









*Cawdor*  
*and other poems*





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*by*

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## *Cawdor*

### I

In nineteen-nine a fire swept our coast hills,  
But not the canyons oceanward; Cawdor's ranges  
And farm were safe. He had posted sentinels,  
His son George and his man Jesus Acanna,  
On two hills, and they watched the fire all night  
Stream toward Cachagua; the big-coned inland pines  
Made pillars of white flame.

#### Cawdor at dawn

Stood by his door and saw in the bronze light  
That leaked through towers of smoke windowed with  
    sanguine  
Reflections of the burning, two does and a fawn  
Spring down the creek-bed stones of his ravine  
Fleeing from their terror, and then a tawny mountain-lion  
With no eyes for the deer. Next walked a lame  
Gray horse, a girl led it, a broken old man,  
His face bound with a dirty cloth, clung weakly  
To the limping withers. Cawdor recognized him  
Though he was faceless, old Martial, who had got a place  
In the hills two years before, a feeble old man  
Marked for misfortune; his stock, the first year, sickened  
With lump-jaw; when a cow died in the creek

Martial had let her lie there. Then Cawdor had ridden  
And cursed him, and Cawdor with his man Acanna  
Roped the horns to draw the carcass out of the stream,  
But when they drew, it burst.  
Now Martial came, he and his daughter Fera,  
For refuge, having saved from the fire nothing  
But their own lives and the lame horse.

The old man

Reeled and was dumb with pain, but the girl asked  
For Hood Cawdor, and Cawdor said "Not here.  
He left last winter." Hood was his second son,  
The hunter, with whom he had quarrelled. And Fera  
Martial:  
"We've come," she pointed toward the smoke-towers,  
"from that.  
You are Hood's father. You've the same drooping eyes,  
like a big animal's  
That never needs to look sideways. I'm sorry, you'll have  
to take us in. My father is burnt, he is blinded.  
The fire was on us before we awoke. He tried to fetch a  
bridle out of the burning stable.  
There was a drum of coal-oil against the wall exploded  
and blew fire over his face.  
I dragged him out of the fire." He said "Bring him in."  
"It wasn't dark," she answered, "the oaks were like  
torches,  
And all the hill roared like a wave. He says we can go in,  
father, here is the door-step."  
The old man groaned, lifting his hand to his face but not  
touching it, and hung back from the door.  
"I wish to God you had left me at home." She said, "Your  
home?" "To be a blackened log with the others

Lying quiet," he said, "in the burnt hollow under the hill,  
and not have any care and not come  
Blind and crying to my enemy's place." He turned in her  
hands and said "Oh Fera, where is the sun?  
Is it afternoon?" She stood and held him. "Dear, only  
dawn. I think it must have come up, it's hidden  
In the hell of smoke." "Turn me that way before I go in,  
To the good light that gave me so many days. I have  
failed, and failed, and failed. Now I'll go in  
As men go into the grave, and not fail any more."

He was in fact passive from that time on,  
Except the restlessness of pain in bed  
While his face scarred and the eyes died in the dark.  
After the pain was lulled he seemed content  
With blindness, it made an end of labor.

Cawdor meanwhile

Would somehow have sent him up coast to Monterey  
To find other charity; but the girl Fera  
Coming ragged and courageous out of the fire  
With cool gray eyes, had troubled his tough heart.  
He'd not seen her before that dawn; and the image  
Of the young haggard girl streaked with the dirt of the fire  
And her skirt torn to bandage her father's face  
Lived like a plant in his blood. He was fifty years old,  
And mocked at himself; she was nineteen, she said.  
But being a beggar really, under the burden  
Of that blind man to care for, discounted youth;  
And Cawdor, whatever the next ten years might bring  
him,  
Felt no weight in the fifty. He had been stronger  
From his youth up than other men, and still

The strength seemed to increase, the only changes  
Toward age were harder lines in the shaven face  
And fewer ferocities; the black passions of anger  
That used to blind him sometimes had almost ceased.  
Perhaps for lack of cause, now the few people  
He dealt with knew him too well to cross him. And he'd  
security  
And rough abundance to offer.

When Martial was able  
Fera led him out-doors about the house  
To feel the sun. He said it had no solidness  
So near the ocean. "At home in the dear cup of the hills it  
used to come down  
Like golden hammers, yet I'm content. Now it's dulled. Is  
there a cloud?" She answered, "Cypresses planted  
Around the house, but the wind has broken them so . . .  
Sit on this bench by the door, here it beats golden."  
He sat, and soon handled a thing beside him on the warm  
plank. "What's this thing on the bench,  
Like a saucer with little holes?" "An old sea-shell," she  
answered, "an abalone's. They grow on the ocean-reef;  
All this black soil's full of their shells, the Indians brought  
up." He said: "Fera: while we stay here  
Will you do something to lengthen the life you saved?  
When's the new moon? Go down when the tides drain out  
In the dark of the moon and at full moon, gather me mus-  
sels and abalones, I'll drink the broth  
And eat the meat, it is full of salts and nourishment. The  
ancestors of our life came from the sea  
And our blood craves it, it will bring me years of health."  
She answered, "He wants us to go to-morrow." "Go,  
where?"

"That I can't tell. Is the sun pleasant?" "Oh, we can't go," he said, "you needn't be troubled. The sun is faint but pleasant. Now is that Cawdor passing?" "No. Concha Rosas," she answered. "She helps the cook. She helped me when you were sick."

Fera with private thoughts  
Watched the Indian-blooded woman about her work  
Pass in the dooryard, and go after a moment,  
Carrying a pan under her arm, to the halved cask  
Against the lift of the hill, where water trickled  
From a wood pipe; tall weeds and calla lilies  
Grew in the mud by it; the dark fat woman  
Sat on a stone among them, paring and washing  
Whatever was in the pan; and Fera said carefully:  
"She has a child with blue eyes and she is an Indian.  
She and the boy had their rooms in the house  
When we came here, but Mr. Cawdor has moved them  
To the old adobe out-building where Acanna  
Lives with his wife." Her father listened or not, and  
answered: "Fera,  
Am I still in the sun?" "Oh? Yes." "It is faint," he said,  
"but pleasant. I suppose now you can see the ocean  
With golden scales on the broad blue?" "No," she answered,  
"we face up the canyon, toward the dark  
redwoods."

Cawdor's daughter Michal came by,  
A blue-eyed girl of fourteen, nearly as tall as Fera.  
She had a trap in her hand, and a live ground-squirrel  
Dangled from it by the crushed paws. Then Fera  
Left her father a moment to go with Michal  
To the eagle's cage, to watch the captive be fed.

Against a cypress, a wide wire-screened box; no perch in it  
But a wood block, for the bird's wing was broken.  
Hood Cawdor, Michal's brother, had shot it, the autumn  
Before he went away, and Michal had kept it alive.

She laid the squirrel inside and opened the trap.  
The girls, their arms lacing each other's shoulders,  
Set their faces against the wire to watch  
The great dark-feathered and square-shouldered prisoner  
Move in his corner. One wide wing trailed through filth  
Quickening a buzz of blow-flies; the fierce dark eyes  
Had dropped their films, "He'll never be tame," Michal  
said sadly.

They watched the squirrel begin to drag its body  
On the broken fore-paws. The indomitable eyes  
Seemed never to have left the girls' faces but a grim hand  
Came forward and gathered its prey under its talons.  
They heard a whispering twitter continue  
Below the hover of the dark plumes, until  
The brown hackles of the neck bowed, the bleak head  
Stooped over and stilled it.

Fera turned at a shadow  
And saw Cawdor behind her, who said "One thing it's  
good for,  
It makes Michal catch squirrels. Well, Fera, you're ready  
to go to-morrow?" "Let me go back to my father,"  
She said, "I've left him alone too long. No, we're not  
ready." He followed her; Michal remained.  
She touched her father's hand and spoke of the sun.  
Old Martial lifted his cloth face, that he wore  
To hide the scars; his voice dulled through the cloth:  
"It is faint but very pleasant. I've been asleep."

She said "Mr. Cawdor's here." And Cawdor: "How are  
you. Now that he's better, Fera, little Romano  
(That's Concha Rosas' boy) could take him walking in  
the afternoons and let you have a free time  
To ride with Michal. If you could stay here. It's pitiful to  
see youth chained to helpless old age.

However, I have to drive to Monterey in the morning.

I've put it off as long as I could,  
And now he's able." She looked at Cawdor's face and his  
hands, and said "He means, father, that we  
Must go to-morrow. I told you." Who sighed and an-  
swered, "That would be a long journey for nothing at  
all.

Are people more kind there? Wherever an old pitiful blind  
man goes

Someone will have to lead him and feed him and find him  
a bed. The world is not so made, Fera,

That he could starve. There *is* a God, but in human kind-  
ness." Cawdor said gravely: "Now's the other fool's  
turn

To speak: it makes me mad to have to spread out my  
foolishness.

I never had time to play with colored ribbons, I was  
brought up hard. I did a man's work at twelve

And bossed a gang at eighteen. That gets you nowhere. I  
learned that ruling poor men's hands is nothing,  
Ruling men's money's a wedge in the world. But after I'd  
split it open a crack I looked in and saw

The trick inside it, the filthy nothing, the fooled and rot-  
ten faces of rich and successful men.

And the sons they have. Then I came down from the city.  
I saw this place and I got it. I was what you call honest  
but I was hard; the little Mexican

Cried when I got it. A canyon full of redwoods and hills  
guaranteed not to contain gold.  
I'd what I wanted, and have lived unshaken. My wife  
died when Michal was born; and I was sorry,  
She seemed frightened at the end; but life was not  
changed.  
I am fifty years old, the boys have grown up; and now  
I'm caught with wanting something and my life is  
changed.  
I haven't slept for some nights. You'd think I might have  
been safe at fifty. Oh, I'm still my own master  
And will not beg anything of you. Old blind man your  
girl's beautiful, I saw her come down the canyon  
Like a fawn out of the fire. If she is willing: if you are  
willing, Fera, this place is yours.  
It's no palace and no kingdom: but you are a beggar. It  
might be better for you to live  
In a lonely place than lead your old blind-man up the cold  
street  
And catch dimes in his hat. If you're not willing:  
I'll tell you something. You are not safe here, by God  
you're not. I've been my own master;  
But now I'm troubled with two wolves tearing each other:  
to kneel down like a fool and worship you,  
And the other thing." She whitened and smiled. "I'm not  
afraid: but I'm not experienced. Marriage you mean?  
There's no security in anything less. We are, as you say,  
beggars: we want security." Old Martial  
Groped and muttered against her. She laughed: "I'm  
driving a bargain: be quiet, father." Cawdor said  
sadly:  
"I think that I am the one being made a fool of, old man,  
not you. Fera, if you were willing

We'd drive up and be married to-morrow. And then . . .  
there must be something . . . clothes, clothes: you  
look ridiculous

Bursting through Michal's like the bud of a poppy." She  
stood quietly and looked over the dooryard  
At Concha Rosas peeling potatoes beside the fountain.

"Who's that wide-lapped dark o' the moon  
Among the lilies?" He said, "Why: Concha. You know  
her." "Oh, Concha. And now you've moved her out  
of the house."

"Yes," he said angrily. And Fera laughing: "There is  
nothing under the sun worth loving but strength: and I  
Had some but it's tired, and now I'm sick of it. I want you  
to be proud and hard with me; I'm not tame  
If you ever soften. Oh, yes, to your offer. I'd a friend once  
that had fine dreams, she didn't look forward  
Into her mist of moon on the roses—not Rosas—you  
remember Edith,

Father?—with half the heart that races me to meet to-  
morrow." Then Cawdor shuddered with hope of love;  
His face relaxing began to look like an old man's. He  
stooped toward Fera, to fondle or kiss,

She drew herself back. "Not now. Oh, I'll be honest  
And love you well." She took her father by the arm. "The  
sun's passed from the bench, father, come in.

I'll build a fire on the hearth if you want." And Cawdor:

"That's it! You like horses, that's what I'll give you.  
You liked mine but I'll buy you better; Morales has a  
pair of whites as beautiful as flowers.

We'll drive by there to-morrow. Like kittens they are."  
He followed her in-doors.

Blue kingfisher laughing, laughing in the lit boughs  
Over lonely water,  
Is there no man not duped and therefore you are laughing?  
No strength of a man  
But falls on folly before it drops into dust?  
Go wicked arrow down to the ocean  
And learn of gulls: they laugh in the cloud, they lament  
also.  
The man who'd not be seduced, not in hot youth,  
By the angel of fools, million-worshipped success,  
The self-included man, the self-armored,  
And never beguiled as to a bull nor a horse,  
Now in his cooled and craglike years  
Has humbled himself to beg pleasure: even power was  
better.  
Laugh kingfisher, laugh, that is their fashion.  
Whoever has discerned the vanity of water will desire  
wind.

## II

The night of Cawdor's marriage, his son  
Hood Cawdor lay in the north on the open sand-beach  
Of a long lake. He was alone; his friend in that country  
Who hunted with him, had gone to the Indian camp.  
Hood slept beside his fire and seemed to awake  
And hear the faint ripple, and wind in far firs,  
Then all at once a voice came from the south  
As if it had flown mountains and wide valleys yet clearly  
heard  
And like a dying man's, "Hood, Hood. My son." He saw  
His father's face clearly a moment after  
Distorted either with pain or approach of death.  
But then the actual stars of the night came through it,

Like those of a winter evening, Orion rising,  
Altair and Vega going west. When he remembered  
It was early autumn, he knew it must be past midnight.  
He laid a flare of twigs on the live coals  
Before he lay down ; eyes on the opposite shore  
Would have seen the sharp stars in the black crystal  
Of the lake cancelled by a red comet's tail.

That night and in the morning Hood had no doubt  
His father had just died, or approached death ;  
But dreams and visions are an obscure coinage  
No sane person takes faithfully. He thought of writing  
To his sister Michal ; he had no habit of writing.  
Months later, after the rains began and cramped  
His migrant hunting, he thought not with much sorrow  
Yet mournfully, of his father as dead ; and thought  
That he'd a share in the place unless he'd been,  
As appeared likely, cut off by a written will.  
No doubt it was too late to see the old man,  
Yet he'd go south. He sold his horse and shot-gun, took  
his rifle and went south.

He approached home  
Over the hills, not by the coast-road from Monterey.  
Miles beyond miles a fire had devoured,  
Until he looked from the height into the redwood canyons  
pitching to the ocean, these were unhurt,  
Dark green and strong. Then he believed his father could  
not have died.

The first canyon he entered,  
A mountain-lion stood stilted on a bare slope between  
alder and redwood watching him come down :

Like the owner of the place: he slid the rifle-stock to his  
cheek, thinking "The hills have not been hunted  
Since I've been gone"; he fired, and the lank August-  
pasture-colored body somersaulted  
Over the ridge; he found it lying under a laurel-bush. The  
skinning was a long toil; Hood came  
Burdened across the fall of twilight to the great dome of  
high-cliffed granite, they call it the Rock,  
That stands out of the hill at the head of Cawdor's canyon.

Here, after

the trivial violent quarrel  
That sped him from home the year before, he had built a  
fire at dusk hoping Michal would see it  
And come to bid him good-bye; she had seen and come. He  
stood now and saw, down the great darkening gorge,  
The reddish-yellow windows glimmer in his father's house,  
the iron-dark ocean a bank beyond,  
Pricked at the gray edge with one pin-point ship's light.  
Deep, vast, and quiet and sad. After a little  
He gathered sticks under the oaks and made a fire on the  
Rock's head, wishing Michal might see it.  
If not, he could go down in the morning, (he'd blanket and  
food) and see whether the place was changed.

Michal had gone in-doors but Acanna saw it,  
A bright high blood-drop under the lump-shaped moon,  
When he was stamping stable-yard muck from his boots  
Before he went in to supper. He said to the new farmhand  
Dante Vitello, the Swiss whom Cawdor had brought  
From Monterey: "You seen strangers go through?  
Some fellow's got a fire on the Rock." Then Michal  
Hurried her meal and went out. The fire waned,

Rayless red star up the blue-shadow-brimming  
Moon-silver-lipped gorge. Michal went doubtfully  
Up the dim moon-path by the lone redwood that lately  
Excited by her father's marriage  
She'd made a secret marriage with, and a law  
That she must always touch it in passing. She touched it  
Without much ceremony, and climbed, and peered  
Under the oaks at the man out on the Rock's head.  
Oh, it was Hood, in the red ember-glow. They met  
gladly;  
The edge of shadow and moon-gleam down the gulf of the  
canyon crept up out of sight  
Under the Rock before she went home. Hood said "You'll  
ask the old man whether he'd like to see me.  
But tell him that I'll not stay. No plowing, I'm not a  
farmer." "You're still only a hunter," she answered.

By the house under the broken cypresses;  
The saffron dawn from which Hood had descended  
Still hung in the V of the canyon; Cawdor with morning  
friendliness, "Stay for a week if you like. Don't fear,  
I won't set you at plowing, we've done the plowing. My  
wife's father," he said, "has your old room,  
But you can have the one on the north, used to be  
Concha's." Fera Martial came out; she had changed  
Amazingly from the sallow girl that Hood  
Had seen two years ago at the lean farm. The eyes had not  
changed. A wind blew from her eyes  
Like sea-wind from the gray sea. "Here's Hood," said  
Cawdor. "He looks more like you," she said, "than  
either of the others."  
"As long as you don't ask him to work. George works,  
but this

Is only a hunter. Let him have the little north room for a week." Hood unstrapped the raw stiffening Puma-skin from his pack. "I owe you a wedding-present," he said to Fera, "if you'll take this I'll get it tanned. I shot it yesterday." Fera took in both hands the eight-foot trophy, she made To draw it over her shoulders, "Stop. It's not dry, you'll stain your dress." "Who am I," she said impatiently, "Not to be stained?" She assumed it like a garment, the head with the slits for eyes hung on her breast, The moonstone claws dangling, the glazed red fleshy under-side  
Turned at the borders, her bare forearm crossing it.  
"Sticky," she said and took it in-doors. "Come in."  
He carried his pack, she led him up-stairs to the north room. "This was not yours when you used to live here."  
"No. Mine was where your father is now." "Then who had this one?"  
He answered "I don't remember: nobody: I guess it was empty." "That Rosas woman," she answered, "had it. But the bed's aired." She left him there and went down.

He went out-doors to find Michal again  
And couldn't find her; he wandered about and played with the horses,  
Then Michal was coming up from the field seaward.  
She carried a trap in her hand, and a live ground-squirrel  
Dangled from it by the crushed paws, the white-rimmed  
Eyes dull with pain, it had lain caught all night.  
"What's that, Michal, why don't you kill it?" "A treat for the eagle.  
I've taught him to eat beef but he loves to kill.

Oh, squirrels are scarce in winter." "What, you've still got the eagle?"

"Yes. Come and watch." •

Hood remembered great sails  
Coasting the hill and the redwoods. He'd shot for the  
breast,  
But the bird's fate having captivity in it  
Took in the wing-bone, against the shoulder, the messenger  
Of human love; the broad oar of the wing broke upward  
And stood like a halved fern-leaf on the white of the sky,  
Then all fell wrecked. He had flung his coat over its head,  
Still the white talon-scars pitted his forearm.

The cage was not in the old place. "Fera," she said,  
"She made me move it because it smells. I can't  
Scrape the wood clean." Michal had had it moved  
To the only other level on the pitch of the hill;  
The earth-bench a hundred feet above the house-roof,  
An old oak's roots partly upheld; a faint  
Steep path trailed up there. One side of the low leaning  
Bole of the tree was the eagle's cage, on the other  
A lichened picket-fence guarded two graves,  
Two wooden head-boards. Cawdor's dead wife was laid  
here  
Beside a child that had died; an older sister  
Of Hood's and Michal's.

They stood and watched  
The dark square-shouldered prisoner, the great flight-  
feathers  
Of the dragged wing were worn to quills, and beetles  
Crawled by the weaponed feet, yet the dark eyes

Remembered their pride. Hood said "You ought to kill him.

My God, nearly two years!" She answered nothing, But when he looked at her face the long blue eyes Winked and were brimmed. The grim hand took the squirrel,

It made a whispering twitter, the bleak head tore it, And Michal said "George wanted to kill him too. I can't let him be killed. And now, day after day, I have to be cruel to bring him a little happiness." Hood laughed; they stood looking down on the house, All roof and dormers from here, among the thirteen Winter-battered cypresses planted about it.

### III

The next day's noon Michal said, "Her old father Believes that food from the sea keeps him alive. The low tides at full moon we always go down." When Fera came they took sacks for the catch And brown iron blades to pry the shells from the rock. They went to the waste of the ebb under the cliff, Stone wilderness furred with dishevelled weed, but under each round black-shouldered stone universes Of color and life, scarlet and green sea-lichens, violet and rose anemones, wave-purple urchins, Red starfish, tentacle-rayed pomegranate-color sun-disks, shelled worms tuft-headed with astonishing Flower-spray, pools of live crystal, quick eels plunged in the crevices . . . the three intrusive atoms of humanity Went prying and thrusting; the sacks fattened with shell-vaulted meat. Then Fera said "Go out on the reef,

Michal, and when you've filled the sack with mussels call  
Hood to fetch it." "Why should I go? Let *him*."  
"Go Michal, I need Hood to turn over the stones." When  
Michal was gone  
And walked beyond hearing on the low reef, dim little  
remote figure between the blind flat ocean  
And burning sky, Fera stood up and said suddenly:  
"Judge me, will you. Kindness is like . . .  
The slime on my hands, I want judgment. We came out of  
the mountain fire beggared and blinded,  
Nothing but a few singed rags and a lame horse  
That has died since. Now you despise me because I gave  
myself to your father. Do then: I too  
Hate myself now, we've learned he likes dark meat—that  
Rosas—a rose-wreath of black flesh for his bride  
Was not in the bargain. It leaves a taste." Hood steadied  
himself against the wind of her eyes, and quietly:  
"Be quiet, you are telling me things that don't concern me,  
true or not. I am not one of the people that live  
In this canyon." "You can be cold, I knew that, that's  
Cawdor. The others have kindly mother in them.  
Wax from the dead woman: but when I saw your face I  
knew it was the pure rock. I loved him for that.  
For I did love him, he is cold and strong. So when you  
judge me, write in the book that she sold herself  
For someone to take care of her blind father, but not with-  
out love. You had better go out on the reef  
And help Michal."

He went, and kneeling beside his sister to  
scrape the stiff brown-bearded lives  
From the sea face of the rock, over the swinging streaks of  
foam on the water, "Michal," he said,

"I wish you could get free of this place. We must think what we can do. God knows I wouldn't want you Like the girls in town, pecking against a shop-window."

"What did she want to tell you?" "Nothing at all. Only to say she loves the old man. Michal, keep your mind clean, be like a boy, don't love.

Women's minds are not clean, their mouths declare it, the shape of their mouths. They want to belong to someone. But what do I know? They are all alike to me as mussels."

The sack was filled; reluctance to return Had kept him hewing at the thick bed of mussels, letting them slide on the rock and drop in the water, When he looked up Fera had come. "Why do you waste them?" she said. "You're right, waste is the purpose And value of . . . Look, I've something to waste." She extended her hand toward him, palm downward, he saw bright blood

Trickle from the tips of the brown fingers and spot the rock. "You're hurt?" "Oh, nothing. I turned a stone, A barnacle cut me, you were so long coming I thought I could do without you. Well, have you judged me, With Michal to help?" "Let me see the cut," he said angrily. She turned the gashed palm cup-shape upward

On purpose to let a small red pool gather. She heard his teeth grating, that pleased her. He said "I can't see," then she flung it on the ocean. "But you're a hunter, you must have seen many a wild creature Drain, and not paled a shade." He saw the white everted lips of the cut and suffered a pain Like a stab, in a peculiar place. They walked And were silent on the low reef; Hood carried the sea-lymph-streaming sack on his shoulder. Every third step

A cold and startling shadow was flung across them ; the  
sun was on the horizon and the tide turning  
The surf mounted, each wave at its height covered the sun.  
A river of gulls flowed away northward,  
Long wings like scythes against the face of the wave, the  
heavy red light, the cold pulses of shadow,  
The croaking voice of a heron fell from high rose and  
amber.

There were  
three sacks to bring up the cliff.  
Hood sent his sister to fetch a horse to the cliffhead to  
carry them home, but Michal without an answer  
Went home by herself, along the thread of gray fog  
That ran up the great darkening gorge like the clue of a  
labyrinth. Hood, climbing, saw on the cliffhead,  
unreal  
To eyes upward and sidelong, his head cramped by the  
load, like a lit pillar Fera alone  
Waiting for him, flushed with the west in her face,  
The purple hills at her knees and the full moon at her  
thigh, under her wounded hand new-risen.  
He slid the sack on the grass and went down. His knees  
wavered under the second on the jags of rock,  
Under the third he stumbled and fell on the cliffhead.  
They were not too heavy but he was tired. Then Fera  
Lay down beside him, he laughed and stood up. "Where's  
Michal? I sent her to fetch a horse." And Fera  
shivering:  
"I waited for you but Michal went on. My father says  
that life began in the ocean and crept  
Like us, dripping sea-slime up the high cliff. He used to be  
a schoolmaster but mother left him,

She was much younger than he. Then he began to break  
himself on bad liquor. Our little farm  
Was the last refuge. But he was no farmer. We had  
utterly failed  
And fallen on hollow misery before the fire came. That  
sort of thing builds a wall against recklessness.  
Nothing's worth risk; now I'll be mean and cautious all  
the rest of my life, grow mean and wrinkled  
Sucking the greasy penny of security. For it's known be-  
forehand, whatever I attempt bravely would fail.  
That's in the blood. But see," she looked from the ocean  
sundown to the violet hills and the great moon,  
"Because I choose to be safe all this grows hateful. What  
shall I do?" He said scornfully: "Like others,  
Take what you dare and let the rest go." "That is no  
limit. I dare," she answered. He looked aside  
At the dark presence of the ocean moving its foam secretly  
below the red west, and thought  
"Well, what does she want?" "Nothing," she said as if she  
had heard him. "But I wish to God  
*I* were the hunter." She went up to the house,  
And there for days was silent as a sheathed knife,  
Attending her sick father and ruling the housework  
With bitter eyes. At night she endured Cawdor if he  
pleased  
As this earth endures man.

A morning when no one  
Was in the house except her father in his room,  
She stole to Hood's room on the north to fall  
On the open bed and nuzzle the dented pillow  
With a fire face; but then sweating with shame  
Rose and fetched water for some menial service

About her father's body ; he had caught cold  
And was helplessly bedfast again.

#### Meanwhile Hood Cawdor

With hunting deer at waterheads before dawn,  
Evening rides with Michal, lucky shots at coyotes,  
And vain lying-wait and spying of creekside pad-prints  
For the great mountain-lion that killed a calf,  
Contentedly used six days of his quick seven  
And would have gone the eighth morning. But the sixth  
night

The farm-dogs yelled furious news of disaster,  
So that Hood snatched up half his clothes and ran out  
Barefoot ; George came behind him ; they saw nothing.  
The dogs were silent, two of them came at call  
Under the late moonrise cancelled with cloud,  
But would not quest nor lead. Then the young men  
Returned to bed. In the white of dawn they found  
The dog that had not come in the night, the square-jawed  
Fighter and best of the dogs, against the door  
So opened with one stroke of an armed paw  
That the purple entrails had come out, and lay  
On the stone step, speckled with redwood needles.

That postponed Hood's departure, he was a hunter  
And took the challenge. He found the fighting-spot,  
Scratched earth and the dog's blood, but never the slayer.

#### IV

##### A sudden rainstorm

Beat in from the north ocean up a blue heaven and spoiled  
his hunting. The northwest wind veered east

The rain came harder, in heavy falls and electric pauses.  
Hood had come home, he sat with Michal  
Playing checkers; Fera was up-stairs with her father.  
The blind man had grown feebler; he had been in fact  
dying since the fire; but now two days he had eaten  
Nothing, and his lungs clogged. Most of the daytime  
And half the night Fera'd spent by his bedside. He had  
lain deeply absorbed in his own misery,  
His blindness concentrating his mood, until the electric  
streams and hushes of the rain vexed him,  
Toward evening he fell into feverish talk of trivial  
Remembered things, little dead pleasures. Fera gave  
patient answers until he slept. She then  
Left him and slept heavily beside her husband

The rain had ceased, Hood saw a star from  
his window  
And thought if the rain ceased he might give over his  
hunting and go to-morrow. But out of doors  
Was little promise of the rain ceasing; the east wind had  
slipped south, the earth lay expectant. The house  
Wore an iron stub for some forgotten purpose  
Fixed upward from the peak of the roof; to one passing  
out-doors at midnight the invisible metal  
Would have shown a sphered flame, before the thunder  
began.

Fera before  
the first thunderclap  
Dreaming imagined herself the mountain-lion that had  
killed the dog; she hid in leaves and the hunter  
Aimed at her body through a gap in the green. She waited  
the fire, rigid, and through closed lids

Saw lightning flare in the window, she heard the crash of  
the rifle. The enthralling dream so well interpreted  
The flash and the noise that she was not awakened but  
slept to the second thunder. She rose then, and went  
To her father's room for he'd be awakened. He was not  
awakened.

He snored in a new manner, puffing his cheeks. Impossible  
to wake him. She called Cawdor. In the morning  
They sent Acanna, for form's sake, not hope's, to fetch a  
doctor. Hood offered to ride, Acanna was sent.  
The torrents of rain prevented his return, and the doctor's  
coming, to the third day. But northward  
He rode lightly, the storm behind him.

The wind had shifted before dawn and  
grooved itself  
A violent channel from east of south, the slant of the  
coast; the house-roof groaned, the planted cypresses  
Flung broken boughs over the gables and all the lee slope  
of the gorge was carpeted green  
With the new growth and little twigs of the redwoods.  
They bowed themselves at last, the redwoods, not  
shaken  
By common storms, bowed themselves over; their voice  
and not the ocean's was the great throat of the gorge  
That roared it full, taking all the storm's other  
Noises like little fish in a net.

On the open pasture  
The cattle began to drift, the wind broke fences.  
But Cawdor, although unsure and thence in his times  
Violent toward human nature, was never taken  
Asleep by the acts of nature outside; he knew

His hills as if he had nerves under the grass,  
What fence-lengths would blow down and toward what  
cover

The cattle would drift. He rode with George, and Hood  
Rode after, thwart the current in the cracked oaks  
To the open mercy of the hill. They felt the spray  
And sharp wreckage of rain-clouds in the steel wind,  
And saw the legs of the others' horses leaning  
Like the legs of broken chairs on the domed rims  
On the running sky.

In the house Fera  
Sat by her father's bed still as a stone  
And heard him breathe, that was the master-noise of the  
house

That caught the storm's noises and cries in a net,  
And captured her mind; the ruling tenth of her mind  
Caught in the tidal rhythm lay inert and breathing  
Like the old man's body, the deep layers left unruled  
Dividing life in a dream. She heard not the roof  
Crying in the wind, nor on the window  
The endless rattle of earth and pebbles blasted  
From the hill above. For hours; and a broken cypress  
bough

Rose and tapped the strained glass, at a touch the pane  
Exploded inward, glass flew like sparks, the fury of the  
wind

Entered like a wild beast. Nothing in the room  
Remained unmoved except the old man on the bed.

Michal Cawdor had crawled up the hill four-foot  
To weight her eagle's cage with heavier stones  
Against the storm, and creeping back to the house

Heard the glass crash and saw the gapped window. She  
got up-stairs  
And saw in the eddying and half blinded glimmer  
Fera's face like an axe and the window blocked  
With a high wardrobe that had hidden the wall  
Between the two windows, a weight for men  
To strain at, but Fera whose nerves found action before  
Her mind found thought had wrestled it into service  
Instead of screaming, the instant the crash snapped her  
deep trance. When Michal came Fera was drawing  
The table against the wardrobe to hold it firm, her back  
and shoulders flowing into lines like fire  
Between the axe face and the stretched arms: "Ah, shut  
the door," she said panting, "did Hood go with them?  
He hasn't gone?" "Who? Hood?" "Coo if you like: has he  
gone?" "He went with father," she answered  
trembling,  
"To herd the cows . . ." "Why are your eyes like eggs  
then, for he'll come back, Michal?" She went to the  
bedside  
And murmured "He hasn't moved, it hasn't hurt him."  
But Michal: "Did you want Hood?" "Want him? I  
wanted  
Someone to stop the window. Who could bear life  
If it refused the one thing you want? I've made a shutter  
to hold although it sings at the edges.  
Yet he felt nothing. Michal, it doesn't storm for a spar-  
row's death. You and I, Michal, won't have  
A stir like this to speed us away in our times. He is dying".  
Michal answered, "Dante Vitello's  
Roping the haystacks, I'll fetch him Fera?" "What could  
he do while the wind continues, more than I've done?  
We can stand draughts. Oh Michal, a man's life and his soul

Have nothing in common. You never knew my father, he  
had eagle imaginations. This poor scarred face  
For whose sake neither nature nor man has ever stepped  
from the path while he was living: his death  
Breaks trees, they send a roaring chariot of storm to home  
him.

Hood wouldn't leave without his rifle," she said,  
"He didn't take the rifle when he went up?"  
"Why no, not in this wind."

In the afternoon the wind  
Fell, and the spray in the wind waxed into rain.  
The men came home, they boarded the broken window.  
The rain increased all night. At dawn a high sea-bird,  
If any had risen so high, watching the hoary light  
Creep down to sea, under the cloud-streams, down  
The many canyons the great sea-wall of coast  
Is notched with like a murderer's gun-stock, would have  
seen  
Each canyon's creek-mouth smoke its mud-brown torrent  
Into the shoring gray; and as the light gained  
Have seen the whole wall gleam with a glaze of water.

## V

There was a little acre in Cawdor's canyon  
Against the creek, used for a garden, because they could  
water it  
In summer through a wood flume; but now the scour  
Devoured it; and after Cawdor had ditched the barns  
Against the shoreless flood running from the hill,  
In the afternoon he turned to save this acre.

He drove piling to stay the embankment ; Hood pointed  
The beams, and Cawdor drove them with the great  
sledgehammer,  
Standing to his knees in the stream.

Then Fera Cawdor  
Came down the bank without a cloak, her hair  
Streaming the rain, and stood among the brown leafless  
And lavender shoots of willow. "Oh come to the house,  
Hood."  
She struck her hands together. "My father is conscious,  
He wants to speak to Hood, wants Hood." Who wondering  
Gave the axe to his brother and went up.

They came to the room off the short hall-  
way; he heard  
Through the shut door before they reached it the old man's  
breathing: like nothing he'd ever heard in his life:  
Slime in a pit bubbling: but the machine rhythm, intense  
and faultless. She entered ahead  
And drew a cloth over the wrinkled eye-pits; the bald  
scars in the beard, and the open mouth,  
Were not covered. "Ah shut the door," she said, "against  
the wind on the stairway." He came reluctantly  
Into the dreadful rhythm of the room, and said "When was  
he conscious? He is not now." And Fera:  
"He is in a dream: but *I* am in a dream, between black-  
ness and fire, my mind is never gathered,  
And all the years of thoughtful wonder and little choices  
are gone. He is on the shore of what  
Nobody knows: but *I* am on that shore. It is lonely. I was  
the one that needed you. Does he feel anything?"  
He thought, this breathing-machine? "Why no, Fera."

“It is only because I am cold,” she said wringing her hands, violently trembling, “the cold rainwater Rains down from my hair.  
I hated my loose mother but this old man was always gentle and good even in drunkenness.  
Lately I had true delight in doing things for him, the feeding, cleaning, we’d travelled so far together, So many faces of pain. But now he has flown away, where is it?” She mastered her shuddering and said  
“All that I loved is here dying: and now if you should ask me to I would strike his face  
While he lies dying.” But he bewildered in the ice-colored wind of her eyes stood foolish without an answer, And heard her: “Do you understand?” He felt the wind tempered, it fell in tears, he saw them running  
By the racked mouth; she ceased then to be monstrous and became pitiful. Her power that had held him captive  
Ceased also, and now he was meanly afraid of what she might do. He went through the house and found Michal,  
And brought her up to the room. Then Fera lifted her face from the bed, and stood, and answered “Come Michal.  
This is the place. Come and look down and despise us. Oh, we don’t mind. You’re kind: I am wicked perhaps  
To think that he is repulsive as well as pitiful to you. You hunter with a rifle, one shot’s  
Mercy in the life: but the common hunter of the world uses too many; wounds and not kills, and drives you Limping and bleeding, years after years,  
Down to this pit. One hope after another cracked in his hands; the school he had; then the newspaper

He labored day and night to build up, over in the valley.  
His wife, my shameful mother abandoned him.  
He took whiskey for a friend, it turned a devil. He took  
the farm up here, hunted at last  
To the mountain, and nothing grew, no rain fell, the cows  
died  
Before the fire came. Then it took his eyes and now it is  
taking his life. Now it has taken  
Me too, that had been faithful awhile. For I have to tell  
you, dear, dear Michal, before he dies,  
I love you—and Hood for your sake, Michal—  
More than I do this poor old man. He lies abandoned.”  
She stood above him, her thin wet clothing  
In little folds glued to the flesh, like one of the girls in a  
Greek frieze, the air of their motion  
Molds lean in marble; Michal saw her through mist in  
the eyes and thought how lovely she was, and dimly  
Heard her saying: “Do you not wish you were like this  
man, Hood? *I wish I were like this man.*  
He has only one thing left to do. It is great and maybe  
dreadful to die, but nothing’s easier.  
He does it asleep. Perhaps we *are* like this man: we have  
only one thing left to do, Hood,  
One burning thing under the sun. I love you so much,  
Michal, that you will surely forgive  
Whatever it is. You’ll know it is not done wickedly, but  
only from bitter need, from bitter need . . .”  
She saw him frowning, and Michal’s wonder, and cried  
quickly:  
“You needn’t pity him! For even in this deformity and  
shame of obscure death he is much more fortunate  
Than any king of fat steers: under the bone, behind the  
burnt eyes

There have been lightnings you never dreamed of,  
    despairs and exultations and hawk agonies of sight  
That would have cindered your eyes before the fire came.  
Now leave me with him. If I were able I would take him  
    up, groaning to death, to the great Rock  
Over your cramp cellar of a canyon, to flame his bitter  
    soul away like a shot eagle  
In the streaming sky. I talk foolishly. Michal you mustn't  
    come back until he has died, death's dreadful.  
You're still a child. Stay, Hood." But he would not.

He heard in the evening  
The new farmhand talking with Concha Rosas,  
His Alp-Italian accent against her Spanish-  
Indian like pebbles into thick water. "This country  
You cannot trust, it never need any people.  
My old country at home she is not so kind  
But always she need people, she never kill all.  
She is our mother, can't live without us. This one not care.  
It make you fat and soon it cutting your neck."  
Concha answered inaudibly, and the other: "You Indian.  
Not either you. I have read, you come from Ah-sia.  
You come from Ah-sia, us from Europa, no one from here.  
Beautiful *matrigna* country, she care for Indian  
No more nor white nor black, how have she help you?"  
Their talk knotted itself on miscomprehension  
Until *matrigna* shaped into *madrastra*.  
"Beautiful stepmother country."

Hood ceased to hear them.  
Why, so she was. He saw as if in a vision  
The gray flame of her eyes like windows open  
To a shining sky the north wind sweeps, and wind

And light strain from the windows. What wickedness in  
the fabric  
Was driving her mad with binding her to old men?  
He went to the door to look at the black sky.  
He'd leave the house to-night but pity and the rain held  
him.  
He heard the eaves gutter in their puddles and rush  
Of rivulets washing the dark.

While he was there  
She came from the stair and whispered: for they were  
alone  
In the dark room, the others in the lamplit room  
At the table: "If I were hurt in the hills,  
Dying without help, you'd not sneak off and leave me.  
Oh, nobody could do that. Pull the door to  
On that black freedom. Perhaps my father will die  
This drowning night, but can't you see that I am a  
prisoner  
Until he does: the wrists tied, the ankles:  
I can neither hold nor follow.  
No, no, we have to let them take their time dying.  
Why, even on Cawdor's, on your father's account  
It would be wicked to call despair in here  
Before it must come. I might do strangely  
If I were driven. You'll promise. Put your hand here."  
She caught it and held it under the small breast  
Against the one dry thinness of cloth. She had changed  
then.  
He felt it thudding. "I am being tortured you know."  
He shook and said "Until he dies I'll not go.  
Dear child, then you'll be quieter." "When you said  
*child,*

Your voice," she answered, "was as hard as your father's.  
Hood, listen, all afternoon

I have been making a dream, you know my two white  
horses,

They are like twins, they mustn't be parted.

One for you, one for me, we rode together in the dream  
Far off in the deep world, no one could find us.

We leaned and kissed . . ." He thrust her off, with violent  
fear,

And felt her throat sob in his hand, the hot slender  
Reed of that voice of hers, the drumming arteries  
Each side the reed flute. She went crouching and still  
To the stair; he stood in the dark mourning his violence.

But she had gone up into the snoring rhythm  
Neither day nor night changed. Cawdor had asked her  
Whom she would have to watch with her all night,  
"For you must sleep a little." She had chosen Concha  
Rosas; and that was strange, he thought she had always  
Hated Concha. He came at the end of evening  
And brought the brown fat silent woman.

Then Fera

Looked up, not rising from the chair by the bed,  
And said with a difficult smile over the waves of noise:  
"I was thinking of a thing that worried my father, in the  
old days. He made a bargain with a man  
To pasture his horse, the horse died the first week. The  
man came asking pay for a year's pasture  
For a dead horse. My father paid it at last, I wouldn't  
have paid it." "No, hardly," he answered. And Fera:  
"The bargain ends when the man dies—when the horse  
dies." She looked at her dying father and said

Shuddering: "I'm sorry to keep you up all night, Concha;  
but you can sleep in your chair. He was always  
A generous fool, he wasn't made for this world." Cawdor  
looked down at the bed through the dull noise  
Like surf on a pebble shore, and said that he'd been out to  
look at the bridge; it was still standing.  
The rain would break to-night, the doctor would come to-  
morrow. "That would be late, if there were hope,"  
She answered, "no matter." "Dear child," he said  
hoarsely, "we all die." "Those that have blood in us.  
When you said *child*,  
Your voice," she answered, "was as hard as a flint. We  
know that you and the Rock over the canyon  
Will not die in our time. When they were little  
children  
Were you ever kind?" "Am I not now?" "Oh, kind." She  
leaned sidewise and smoothed  
The coverlet on the bed, but rather as a little hawk slips  
sidelong from its flapping vantage  
In the eye of the wind to a new field. "But about blood in  
the stone veins, could Concha tell me?  
Look, his face now Concha, pure rock: a flick and it  
shows. Oh," she said and stood up, "forgive me.  
For I am half mad with watching him  
Die like an old steer the butcher forgot. It makes me  
Mad at your strength. He had none: but his mind had  
shining wings, they were soon broken."

When Cawdor went out  
She said to Concha, "It is growing cold. Wrap yourself in  
the blanket before you sleep in the chair."  
When Concha nodded she went and shook her awake, by  
the fat shoulder. "Did Hood make love to anyone

In those old days? They're hot at sixteen." "He never. Oh  
no." "You didn't serve the father and the sons?  
Whom did he love?" "Nobody. He love the deer  
He's only a boy and he go hunting." Fera whispered from  
the throat: "I wish to God, you brown slug,  
That I had been you, to scrape the mud from his boots  
when he came in from hunting: or Ilaria Acanna  
Cooking him little cakes in the oak-smoke, in the white  
dawns when the light shakes like water in a cup  
And the hills are foam: for now who knows what will  
happen?  
Oh sleep, cover your head with the blanket, nothing has  
changed."

She went about the room and rested in her chair.  
The snoring rhythm took her mind captive again,  
And in a snatch of sleep she dreamed that Michal  
Had stolen her lion-skin, the one that Hood had given her,  
And wore it in the hills and was shot for a lion.  
Her dead body was found wrapped in the skin.  
There was more, but this was remembered.

#### Perhaps the minds

That slept in the house were wrought to dreams of death  
By knowledge of the old man's ebbing. Hood Cawdor  
Dreamed also of a dead body; he seemed a child; at first  
He dreamed it was his father lay dead in the house,  
But afterwards his father held him by the hand  
Without a break in the dream. They looked through a  
door  
Into the room in which his mother lay dead.  
There an old woman servant, who had now been gone  
These many years, prepared his mother's body

For burial; she was washing the naked corpse.  
Matrigna; madrastra. He awoke and lay in the dark  
Gathering his adult mind, assuring himself  
The dream grew from no memory; he remembered  
His mother living, nothing of seeing her dead.  
Yes, of the burial a little; the oak on the hill,  
And the red earth. His thought of the grave calmed him  
So that he was falling asleep.

But Fera remained awake  
After her dream. How could one drive a wedge  
Between the father and the son? There was not now  
Any affection: but Hood was loyal: or afraid.  
They had quarrelled the time before. The snatch of sleep  
Had cleared her mind.

She heard the snoring rhythm  
Surely a little slower and a little slower,  
Then one of the old hands drew toward the breast.  
The breathing failed; resumed, but waning to silence.  
The throat clicked when a breath should have been drawn.  
A maze of little wrinkles, that seemed to express  
Surprised amusement, played from the hollow eye-pits  
Into the beard.

## VI

The window was black still.  
No cock had cried, nor shiver of dawn troubled the air.  
The stale lamp shone and smelled. Ah, what a silence.  
She crossed the room and shook Concha. "Get up,  
Concha.  
He has died. I was alone and have closed his mouth.

Now I'll go out." She thought in the hallway,  
"Besides, I am greedy to be caught in Hood's room.  
We can but die, what's that. Where did this come from?"  
She whispered, staring at the candle she held  
Without a memory of having found nor lighted it.  
She opened Hood's door and shut it behind her.

"He has died!"

No answer. Then Fera felt the tears in her eyes  
Dried up with fear. "You haven't gone? Are you here  
Hood?"

She saw him lifting his face from the shadows like a sea-  
lion from the wave. "I dreaded  
You'd slip away from here in my night. It is finished  
and I

Alone was by him, your father's flitch of dark meat snored  
in a corner. He has died. All the wild mind  
And jagged attempts are sealed over." Her voice lifted  
and failed, he saw her sleep-walker face  
Candle-lighted from below, the shadow of the chin cover-  
ing the mouth and of the cheek-bones the eyes  
To make it the mask of a strained ecstasy, strained  
fleshless almost. Herself was wondering what sacred  
fear

Restrained her, she'd meant to go touch, but here desire  
at the height burned crystal-separate. He said,  
staring:

"Have you called my father? I'll dress and come, what  
can I do?" "Do you think I will call," she said quietly,  
"Cawdor?" She stopped and said: "Death is no terror, I  
have just left there. Is there anything possible to fear  
And not take what we want, openly with both hands? I  
have been unhappy but that was foolish

For now I know that whatever bent this world around us,  
whether it was God or whether it was blind  
Chance piled on chance as blind as my father,  
Is perfectly good, we're given a dollar of life to gamble  
against a dollar's worth of desire  
And if we sin we have both but losers lose nothing,  
Oh, nothing, how are they worse off than my father, or a  
stone in the field? Why, Hood, do you sleep naked?"  
She asked him, seeing the candle's gleam on the arm and  
shoulder. "I brought no night-clothes with me," he  
sullenly  
Answered, "I didn't expect people at night. What do you  
want?" "Nothing. Your breast's more smooth  
Than rubbed marble, no hair like other men in the groove  
between the muscles, it is like a girl's  
Except the hardness and the flat strength. No, why do  
you cover it, why may I not look down with my eyes?  
I'd not hide mine. No doubt I'll soon die,  
And happy if I could earn that marble to be my grave-  
stone. You might cut letters in it. I know  
It never would bleed, it would cut hard. *Fera Martial*  
you'd carve, the letters of a saved name,  
Why should they fall like grains of sand and be lost  
forever  
On the monstrous beach? But while I breathe I have to  
come back and beat against it, that stone, for nothing,  
Wave after wave, a broken-winged bird  
Wave after wave beats to death on the cliff. Her blood in  
the foam. If I were another man's wife  
And not Cawdor's you'd pity me." "Being what you are,"  
he answered: he rose in the bed angrily, her eyes  
Took hold like hands upon the beautiful bent shoulders  
plated from the bone with visible power

Long ridges lifting the smooth skin, the hunter slender-  
ness and strength: "being what you are you will  
gather

The shame back on your mind and kill it. We've not been  
made to touch what we would loathe ourselves for  
To the last drop." She said "What were you saying? Do  
you think I should be shameless as a man making  
Love to reluctance, the man to you for a woman, if I had  
time, if you were not going to-morrow?

If I just had time, I'd use a woman's cunning manners, the  
cat patience and watchfulness: but shame  
Dies on the precipice-lip." "I hear them stirring in the  
house," he answered. "You lie, Hood. You hear  
nothing.

This little room on the north is separate and makes no  
sound, your father used to visit his thing here,  
You children slept and heard nothing. You fear him of  
course. I can remember having feared  
something . . .

That's long ago. I forget what. Look at me once,  
Stone eyes am I too horrible to look at? If I've no beauty  
at all, I have more than Concha had

When she was more fawn than sow, in her lean years, did  
your father avoid her? I must have done something  
In ignorance, to make you hate me. If I could help it,  
would I come

Fresh from the death of the one life I have loved to make  
myself

Your fool and tell you I am shameless, if I could help it?  
Oh that's the misery: you look at me and see death,  
I am dressed in death instead of a dress, I have drunk  
death for days, makes me repulsive enough,  
No wonder, but you too Hood

Will drink it sometime for all your loathing, there are two  
of us here  
Shall not escape.

Oh, but we shall though, if you are willing.  
There is one clean way. We'll not take anything  
Of Cawdor's, I have two horses of my own. And you can  
feed us with the rifle. Only to ride beside you  
Is all I want. But I would waken your soul and your eyes,  
I could teach you joy.

I know that you love  
Liberty, I'd never touch your liberty. Oh, let me ride  
beside you a week, then you could leave me.  
I'd be your . . . whatever you want, but you could have  
other women. That wouldn't kill me; but not to be  
with you  
Is death in torture." Her hope died of his look. "I know  
we came from the fire only to fail,  
Fail, fail, it's bred in the blood. But," she cried suddenly,  
"you lie when you look like that. The flesh of  
my body  
Is nothing in my longing. What you think I want  
Will be pure dust after hundreds of years and something  
from me be crying to something from you  
High up in the air."

She heard the door open behind her, she  
turned on the door. Cawdor had come.  
She cried "Have you waked at last? You sleep like logs,  
you and your son. He has died. I can wake nobody.  
I banged your door, but this one was unlatched and when  
I knocked it flew open. Yet I can't wake him.

Is it decent to leave me alone with the sow Concha in the  
pit of sorrow?" His confused violent eyes  
Moved and shunned hers and worked the room, with the  
ancient look of men spying for their own dishonor  
As if it were a lost jewel. "How long ago did you knock? I  
have been awake." "What do I know  
Of time? He has died." She watched him tremble, con-  
trolling with more violence the violence in him; and  
he said:  
"I know he has died. I came from that room." Then Fera,  
knowing  
That Hood looked like a boy caught in a crime but herself  
like innocence: "How did you dare to go in?  
Oh yes, the dead never stand up. But how did you dare?  
You never once hid your contempt  
While he was living. You came and cursed him because  
our cow died in the creek. Did he want it to die?  
Then what have you done just now, spat in his face? I was  
not there, he lay at your mercy." She felt  
Her knees failing, and a sharp languor  
Melt through her body; she saw the candle-flame (she had  
set the candle on the little table) circling  
In a short orbit, and Cawdor's face waver, strange heavy  
face with the drooping brows and confused eyes,  
Said something heavily, unheard, and Fera answered:  
"Certainly I could have gone in and called you,  
but I  
Was looking about the house for someone that loved him.  
You were one of the hunters that hunted him down.  
I thought that Hood . . . but no, did he care? I couldn't  
awake him. This flesh will harden, I'll be stone too  
And not again go hot and wanting pity in a desert of  
stones. But you . . . you . . . that old blind man

Whom you despised, he lived in the house among you a  
hawk in a mole-hill. And now he's flown up. Oh, death  
Is over life like heaven over deep hell." She saw Michal in  
the door. "You're here too, Michal?  
My father has died. *You* loved him."

She said in the hallway,  
"Are you well, Michal? I'm not; but when I slept  
A snatch of the early night I dreamed about you.  
You wrapped yourself in the mountain-lion skin  
That Hood gave me, and Jesus Acanna shot you for a  
lion."

## VII

Cawdor remained behind in the room,  
But Hood pretended to have been asleep and hardly  
Awakened yet. Certainly he'd not betray  
The flaming-minded girl his own simplicity  
Imagined a little mad in her sorrow. He answered  
Safe questions, but the more his intent was innocent  
The more his looks tasted of guilt. And Cawdor:  
"When are you going?" "To-day." "That's it? By God  
You'll wait until the old blind man is buried.  
What did she call you for,  
Yesterday in the rain?" "She said her father  
Was conscious, but when I came he was not conscious."  
"Well, he's not now," he answered, his brows drooping  
Between the dawn and the candle. Dawn had begun,  
And Cawdor's face between the pale window  
And the small flame was gray and yellow. "Get dressed,"  
he said.  
He turned to go, and turned back. "You were such friends

With that old man, you'll not go till he's buried."

He went and found Fera, in the room with the dead.  
But seeing her bloodless face, and the great eyes  
Vacant and gray, he grew somberly ashamed  
Of having thought her passion was more than grief.  
He had meant to charge Concha to watch her  
While Hood remained in the house. He forgot that, he spoke  
Tenderly, and persuaded Fera to leave  
Concha to watch the dead, and herself rest  
In her own room. Michal would sit beside her  
All morning if she were lonely. "And Hood," he said,  
Spying on her face even against his own will,  
"Wanted to go to-day, I told him to wait.  
Why did you call him, yesterday in the rain?"  
"Yesterday?" "You came in the rain." "If that was  
yesterday:

Our nights have grown long. I think my father called him,  
(My father was then alive) wishing to talk  
Of the Klamath country. He too had travelled. He  
despised people  
Who are toad-stools of one place." "Did they talk long?"  
"I can't remember. You know: now he has died.  
Now the long-laboring mind has come to a rest.  
I am tired too. You don't think that the mind  
Goes working on? That would be pitiful. He failed in  
everything.

After we fail our minds go working under the ground,  
digging, digging . . . we talk to someone,  
The mind's not there but digging around its failure. That  
would be dreadful, if even while he lies dead  
The painful mind's digging away . . ." Cawdor for pity  
Of the paper-white face shrunk small at dawn

Forbore then, he folded his doubts like a man folding  
A live coal in his hand.

Fera returned  
To her father's room; she said, "Concha, go down to  
breakfast. Michal,  
Leave me alone for God's sake." Being left alone she knelt  
by the bed: "In that dim world, in that  
Dim world, in that dim world, father? . . . there's nothing.  
*I am between the teeth still but you are not troubled.*  
If only you could *feel* the salvation."

She was mistaken. Sleep and delirium are  
full of dreams;  
The locked-up coma had trailed its clue of dream across  
the crippled passages; now death continued  
Unbroken the delusions of the shadow before. If these had  
been relative to any movement outside  
They'd have grown slower as the life ebbed and stagnated  
as it ceased, but the only measure of the dream's  
Time was the dreamer, who geared in the same change  
could feel none; in his private dream, out of the pulses  
Of breath and blood, as every dreamer is out of the hour-  
notched arch of the sky. The brain growing cold  
The dream hung in suspense and no one knew that it did.  
Gently with delicate mindless fingers  
Decomposition began to pick and caress the unstable  
chemistry  
Of the cells of the brain; Oh very gently, as the first weak  
breath of wind in a wood: the storm is still far,  
The leaves are stirred faintly to a gentle whispering: the  
nerve-cells, by what would soon destroy them, were  
stirred

To a gentle whispering. Or one might say the brain began  
to glow, with its own light, in the starless  
Darkness under the dead bone sky; like bits of rotting  
wood on the floor of the night forest  
Warm rains have soaked, you see them beside the path  
shine like vague eyes. So gently the dead man's brain  
Glowing by itself made and enjoyed its dream.

The nights of many years before this time  
He had been dreaming the sweetness of death, as a  
starved man dreams bread, but now decomposition  
Reversed the chemistry; who had adored in sleep under so  
many disguises the dark redeemer  
In death across a thousand metaphors of form and action  
celebrated life. Whatever he had wanted  
To do or become was now accomplished, each bud that  
had been nipped and fallen grew out to a branch,  
Sparks of desire forty years quenched flamed up  
fulfilment.  
Out of time, undistracted by the nudging pulse-beat,  
perfectly real to itself being insulated  
From all touch of reality the dream triumphed, building  
from past experience present paradise  
More intense as the decay quickened, but ever more  
primitive as it proceeded, until the ecstasy  
Soared through a flighty carnival of wines and women to  
the simple delight of eating flesh, and tended  
Even higher, to an unconditional delight. But then the  
interconnections between the groups of the brain  
Failing, the dreamer and the dream split into multitude.  
Soon the altered cells became unfit to express  
Any human or at all describable form of consciousness.

Pain and pleasure are not to be thought  
Important enough to require balancing: these flashes of  
post-mortal felicity by mindless decay  
Played on the breaking harp by no means countervalued  
the excess of previous pain. Such discords  
In the passionate terms of human experience are not  
resolved, nor worth it.

The ecstasy in its timelessness  
Resembled the eternal heaven of the Christian myth, but  
actually the nerve-pulp as organ of pleasure  
Was played to pieces in a few hours, before the day's end.  
Afterwards it entered importance again  
Through worms and flesh-dissolving bacteria. The per-  
sonal show was over, the mountain earnest continued  
In the earth and air.

But Fera in her false earnestness  
Of passionate life knelt by the bed weeping.  
She ceased when Michal returned. Later in the morning  
She sent Michal to look for Hood and ask him  
Whether he would surely stay as Cawdor had said  
Until they buried her father. "Tell him to come  
Himself and tell me." Michal came back: "He said  
That he was not able to come; but he would stay."  
At noon she saw him. She dressed and went to the table,  
Where Cawdor sat and watched them. Hood shunned her  
eyes;  
She too was silent.

In the afternoon Cawdor came up  
And said "The doctor has come." "Why Michal," she  
said, "but that's a pity.

Came all the sloppy way for nothing, the doctor." "No,"  
Cawdor said. "I want you to see him, Fera.  
You are not well." She went and saw him, in her father's  
room, where Concha with some childhood-surviving  
Belief in magic had set two ritual candles burning by the  
bed of death. The doctor hastily  
Covered the face, the candle-flames went over in the wind  
of the cloth. Fera stood quietly and said  
She had no illness, and her father was dead. "I'm sorry  
you've come so far for nothing." "Oh, well," he  
answered,  
"The coast's beautiful after the rain. I'll have the drive."  
"Like this old man," she said, "and the other  
Millions that are born and die; come all the sloppy way  
for nothing and turn about and go back.  
They have the drive." The young doctor stared; and  
Cawdor angrily  
Wire-lipped like one who hides a living coal  
In the clenched hand: "What more do you want?" "Oh,"  
she answered,  
"I'm not like that"; and went out.

After the doctor had gone  
She vomited, and became so weak afterwards  
That Michal must call Concha to help undress her.  
After another spasm of sickness her dream  
Was like a stone's; until Cawdor awakened her  
In the night, coming to bed. She lay rigid  
And saw the fiery cataracts of her mind  
Pour all night long. Before the cock crew dawn  
Sea-lions began barking and coughing far off  
In the hollow ocean; but one screamed out like torture  
And bubbled under the water. Then Fera rose

With thief motions. Cawdor awoke and feigned sleep.  
She dressed in the dark and left the room, and Cawdor  
Followed silently, the black blood in his throat  
Stood like a knotted rope. She entered, however,  
Her father's room.

She was not surprised, no one was there  
And Concha's candles had died. She fingered the dark  
To find her father, the body like a board, the sheeted face,  
And sat beside the bed waiting for dawn.  
Cawdor, returned to his room, left the door open  
To hear the hallway; he dressed, and waiting for dawn  
Now the first time knew clearly for what reason  
He had made Hood stay: that he might watch and know  
them,  
What they had... whether they had... but that was insane:  
One of the vile fancies men suffer  
When they are too old for their wives. She in her grief?  
He had not the faculty common to slighter minds  
Of seeing his own baseness with a smile. When Hood had  
passed  
The creaking hallway and gone down-stairs, and the other  
Not moved an inch, watching her quiet dead,  
Cawdor was cured of the indulgence jealousy,  
He'd not be a spy again.

But Fera had heard  
Hood pass; she knew Cawdor was watching; she thought  
That likely enough Hood had risen before dawn  
To leave the canyon forever. She sat like a stone  
Turning over the pages of death in her mind,  
Deep water, sharp steel, poisons they keep in the stable  
To wash the wounds of horses...

## VIII

Hood coming in to breakfast from the fragrant light  
Before sunrise, had set his rifle in the corner by the door.  
George Cawdor left the table and going out-doors  
Stopped at the door and took the rifle in his hands  
Out of mere idleness. Hood sharply: "Mine. Put it down!"  
He, nettled, carried it with him to the next room,  
There opened the outer door and lined the sights  
With a red lichen-fleck on a dead cypress twig.  
Hood came behind him and angrily touched his shoulder,  
Reaching across his arm for the rifle; then George,  
Who had meant to tease him and give it back in a  
moment,  
Remembered a grudge and fired. The sharp noise rang  
Through the open house like a hammer-blow on a barrel.  
Hood, in the shock of his anger, standing too near  
To strike, struck with his elbow in the notch of the ribs,  
His hands to the rifle. George groaned, yet half in sport  
still  
Wrestled with him in the doorway.

Hood, not his mind,  
But his mind's eye, the moment of his elbow striking  
The muscle over the heart, remembered his dream of the  
night.  
A dream he had often before suffered. (This came to his  
mind later, not now; later, when he thought  
There is something within us knows our fates from the  
first, our ends from the very fountain; and we in our  
nights  
May overhear its knowledge by accident, all to no  
purpose, it never warns us enough, it never

Cares to be understood, it has no benevolence but only  
knowledge.) He struggled in his dream's twilight  
High on the dreadful verge of a cliff with one who hated  
him  
And was more powerful; the man had pale-flaming gray  
eyes, it was the wind blowing from the eyes,  
As a wind blew from Fera's, that forced him to the fall  
Screaming, for in a dream one has no courage nor self-  
command but only effeminate emotions,  
He hung screaming by a brittle laurel-bush  
That starved in a crack of the rock. From that he had  
waked in terror. He had lain and thought, if Fera  
should come  
But yet once more pleading for love, he would yield, he  
would do what she wanted . . . but soon that sea-lion  
shrieking  
From the hollow ocean thoroughly awaked him, his mind  
stepped over the weakness, even rubbed it from  
memory.  
What came to him now was only the earlier dream  
Mixed with its rage of fear, so that he used  
No temperance in the strife with his brother but struck  
The next blow with his fist shortened to the mouth,  
Felt lips on teeth. They swayed in the gape of the door,  
Hood the aggressor but George the heavier, entwined like  
serpents,  
The gray steel rifle-barrel between their bodies  
Appeared a lance on which both struggled impaled.  
For still they held it heedfully the muzzle outward  
Against the sky through the door.

Hood felt a hand  
Close on his shoulder like the jaws of a horse

And force him apart from the other, he twisted himself  
Without a mind and fought it without knowing whom  
He fought with, then a power struck his loins and the hand  
Snapped him over. He fell, yet with limbs gathered  
Came up as he struck the floor, but even in the crouch  
His mind returned. He saw his father, the old man  
Still stronger than both his sons, darkening above him;  
And George rigid against the wall, blue-faced  
Beyond the light of the door; but in the light,  
Behind Cawdor, Michal with pitiful eyes.  
He said, "Give me the rifle." George, who still held it,  
Sucked his cut lip and gave the rifle to Cawdor;  
Then Hood rose and stood trembling.

But Fera on the stair behind them:  
She had heard the shot and come down half way: "What  
have you killed," she said, "the mountain-lion? You  
snapping foxes  
What meat will you take and be quiet a little? Better than  
you  
Lies quiet up here." But why did her voice ring rather with  
joy than anger? "You deafen the ears of the dead.  
Not one of you there is worthy to wash the dead man's  
body." She approached the foot of the stair; her face  
Was white with joy. "Poor Hood, has he hurt you? I saw  
him pluck you off with two fingers, a beetle from a  
bread-crumble.  
It's lucky for them they'd taken your gun away from you."  
Cawdor said somberly, "What do you want here? The  
boys  
Have played the fool, but you can be quiet." "And George,"  
she answered, "his mouth is bleeding. What dreams  
have stirred you

To make you fight like weasels before the sun has got up? I  
am a woman by death left lonely  
In a cage of weasels: but I'll have my will: quarrel your  
hearts out."

Then Cawdor turned to Hood and gave him the rifle,  
And said to George: "I'm going to the hill with Hood  
And mark a place for the grave. Get down some redwood  
From the shop loft, the twelve-inch planks, when I come  
down

I'll scribe them for you. And sticks of two-by-four  
To nail to at the chest corners." Fera cried "What a burial.  
A weasel coffin-maker and another weasel  
To dig the grave, a man buried by weasels."  
Cawdor said heavily, "Come Hood." And Fera, "The gun  
too?

Be careful after the grave's dug, I wouldn't trust him."  
He turned in the door: "By God I am very patient with you  
For your trouble's sake, but the rope frays."

They had gone and Fera said, "What would he do,  
Beat me perhaps? He meant to threaten me, Michal?  
The man is a little crazy do you think, Michal?"  
She walked in the room undoing the dark braids of her hair.  
"Why should he blame me for what I say? Blame God,  
If there were any.

Your father is old enough to know that nobody  
Since the world's birth ever said or did anything  
Except from bitter need, except from bitter need. How old  
are you Michal?"

"Fifteen," she said. "Dear, please . . ." "Oh, you'll soon  
come to it.

I am better than you all, that is my sorrow.  
What you think is not true." She returned up-stairs

To the still room where one window was blinded  
But the other one ached with rose-white light from clouds,  
And nothing breathed on the bed.

But Michal hastened  
And went up the hill to look to her caged eagle.  
Hood and her father, she feared, would have to move  
The cage, to make room for the grave.

She returned and heard  
A soft roaring in the kitchen of the house.  
"Why have you got the stove roaring, Ilaria?"  
"She want hot water," Ilaria Acanna answered,  
"She put the boilers over and open the drafts,  
I pile in wood." Fera came down. "Not boiling, not yet?  
Put in more oak. Oh, are you there Michal?  
Common water is fair enough to bathe in  
At common times, but now. Let's look out-of-doors.  
I want it hot, there are certain stains. Come on.  
We'll be back when it's hot." In the wind out-doors  
She trembled and said "The world changes so fast,  
Where shall we go, to the shore?" Passing the work-shop  
Beside the stable they heard a rhythmic noise  
Of two harsh notes alternate on a stroke of silence.  
Fera stopped dizzily still, and after a moment:  
"Although it sounded like my father's breathing,  
The days before he died, I'm not fooled, Michal.  
A weasel," she said, "gnawing wood. Don't be afraid."  
She entered. George lifted his dark eyes  
From the saw-cut in the wine-colored redwood planks,  
And Fera: "Oh, have you planed them too? That's kind.  
The shavings are very fragrant.  
How long will these planks last in their dark place

Before they rot and the earth fills them, ten years?"

"These never will rot." "Oh, that's a story. Not redwood even.

There's nothing under the sun but crumbles at last,  
That's known and proved. . . . Where's the other weasel?"

He looked

Morosely into her face and saw that her eyes

Gazed past him toward the skin of the mountain-lion

That Hood had given her. It was nailed wide and flat

In the gable-end, to dry, the flesh side outward,

Smeared with alum and salt. "Your brother weasel,"

She said, "Hood, Hood. The one that nibbled your lip.

How it is swollen." Not George but Michal answered

That Hood was up on the hill; "they had to move

My eagle's cage." Fera looked up at the lion-skin:

"I'll take that, George, that's mine." "Hm, the raw skin?"

"No matter," she said, "get it down. It's for my father.

What else have we got to give him? I'll wrap him in it

To lie like a Roman among the pale people.

. . . On your fine planks!" "You're more of a child than

Michal,"

He said compassionately. "When you said *child*,

Your face," she answered, "softened I thought.

It's not like Hood's." He climbed up by the work-bench

and drew the tacks,

She stood under him to take the skin, Michal beside her.

The scene in the dim work-shop gable-end

Wakes a sunk chord in the mind . . . the scene is a descent

from the cross. The man clambering and drawing

The tyrannous nails from the pierced paws; the sorrowful

women standing below to receive the relic,

Heavy-hanging spoil of the lonely hunter whom hunters

Rejoice to kill: . . . that Image-maker, its drift of metaphors.

George freed the skin, Fera raised hands to take it.  
Her small hard pale-brown hands astonished him, so pale  
and alive,  
Folding the tawny rawhide into a bundle.  
"Where's Cawdor," she said, "your father: on the hill with  
Hood?"  
He had gone up to Box Canyon with Dante Vitello,  
Michal answered. And Fera: "Oh, but how hard it is.  
Perhaps it could be oiled? It is like a board.  
I'll take it to him." But Michal remained with George,  
Tired of her restlessness, and afraid of her eyes.

Fera went up carrying the skin in her arms  
And took it into the house. Ilaria Acanna  
Came out to meet her. "Your water's boiling." "Well, let it  
stand."  
She laid, in the still room-up-stairs, the hard gift  
Over her father's body. "Oh, that looks horrible,"  
She cried shuddering and twitched it off. To hide it from  
sight  
She forced it into the wardrobe against the wall,  
The one she had moved to block the broken window  
In the wild time of storm. She stood and whispered to  
herself,  
And eyed the bed; then she returned out-doors,  
And up the hill to the grave, in the oak's earth-bench  
Above the house. The pit was waist-deep already,  
And Hood was in the pit lifting the pick-axe  
Between the mounds of wet red earth and cut roots.  
Acanna leaned on a shovel above the pit-mouth.  
For lack of room they had dug west of the oak;  
The two old graves lay east. The eagle's cage  
Was moved a few feet farther west; Hood labored

Between the cage and the oak. Jesus Acanna  
From under the low cloud of the oak-boughs, his opaque  
eyes

And Indian silence watched Fera come up the hill,  
But the eagle from the cage watched Hood labor; the one  
With dark indifference, the other  
With dark distrust, it had watched all the grave-digging.

Fera stood among the cut roots and said,  
Lifting her hand to her face: "I was worn out yesterday  
With not sleeping; forgive me for foolish words.  
I came up here to tell you: for I suppose  
You'll go away to-night or to-morrow morning.  
Well, I am taught.

I wish that when you go you'd take for a gift  
One of my white ponies, they'll have to bear being parted.  
Good-bye. Live freely but not recklessly. The unhappy old  
man

For whom you are digging the hole, lost by that.  
He never could learn that we have to live like people in a  
web of knives, we mustn't reach out our hands  
Or we get them gashed." Hood gazing up from the grave:  
"I'm sorry. Yes, early in the morning." He glanced at  
Acanna

And said, "One thing I know, I shan't find loveliness in  
another canyon, like yours and Michal's." She turned  
Away, saying "That's no help," and seemed about to go  
down; but again turning: "I meant to gather  
Some branches of mountain laurel. There are no flowers  
This time of year. But I have no knife. It shouldn't be all  
like a dog's burial." "I'll cut some for you."  
He climbed out of the grave and said to Acanna: "I'll soon  
be back. If you strike rock at this end,

Level off the floor." Fera pointed with her hand trembling:  
    "The tree's in the gap behind the oak-trees.  
It's farther but the leaves are much fresher. Indeed he  
    deserves laurel, his mind had wings and magnificence  
One dash of common cunning would have made famous.  
    And died a cow's death. You and I, if we can bear  
The knocks and abominations of fortune for fifty years yet,  
    have as much to hope for. Don't come. I'm not  
A cheerful companion. Lend me the knife."  
He thought she had better not be trusted alone with it,  
The mind she was in,  
And went beside her, above the older graves,  
He felt his knees trembling. Across the steep slope  
To the far oaks. Dark aboriginal eyes,  
The Indian's and the coast-range eagle's, like eyes  
Of this dark earth watching our alien blood  
Pass and perform its vanities, watched them to the far oaks.  
But after the oaks had hidden them Acanna  
Covetously examined the hunter's rifle  
Left behind, leaning against the lichened fence  
Of the older graves. It was very desirable. He sighed  
And set it back in its place.

    Fera in the lonely  
Oak-shielded shadow under the polished laurel-leaves:  
    "Before you came  
I used to come here," she caught her quivering under lip  
    with the teeth to keep it quiet, "for solitude.  
Here I was sure no one would come, not even the deer, not  
    a bird; safer than a locked room.  
Those days I had no traitor in my own heart, and would  
    gather my spirit here  
To endure old men.

That I have to die  
Is nothing important: though it's been pitied sometimes  
when people are young: but to die in hell. I've lived  
Some days of it; it burns; how I'd have laughed  
Last year to think of anyone taken captive by love. A girl  
imagines all sorts of things  
When she lives lonely but this was never . . . Who knows  
what the dead feel, and it is frightful to think  
That after I have gone down and stilled myself in the  
hissing ocean: roll, roll on the weed: this hunger  
Might not be stilled, this fire nor this thirst . . .  
For how can anyone be sure that death is a sleep? I've  
never found the little garden-flower temperance  
In the forest of the acts of God . . . Oh no, all's forever  
there, all wild and monstrous  
Outside the garden: long after the white body beats to bone  
on the rock-teeth the unfed spirit  
Will go screaming with pain along the flash of the foam,  
gnawing for its famine a wrist of shadow,  
Torture by the sea, screaming your name. I know these  
things. I am not one of the careful spirits  
That trot a mile and then stand."

He had bared his knife-blade to cut the  
bough, enduring her voice, but Fera  
Caught the raised wrist. "Let it be. We have no right. The  
trees are decent, but we! A redwood cut  
To make the coffin, an oak's roots for the grave: some day  
the coast will lose patience and dip  
And be clean. Ah. Is it men you love?  
You are girl-hearted, that makes you ice to me? What do  
you love? What horror of emptiness

Is in you to make you love nothing? Or only the deer and  
the wild feet of the mountain and follow them  
As men do women. Yet you could dip that little knife-blade  
in me for pleasure, I'd not cry out  
More than a shot deer, but I will never leave you  
Until you quiet me." She saw that his face was gray and  
strained as a spent runner's beaten at the goal.  
"Will you kiss me, once, you are going away in a moment  
forever? What do you owe Cawdor, what price  
Of kindness bought you? This morning it was: he struck  
you and flung you on the ground: you liked that?" He  
gathered his strength  
And turned himself to be gone. She caught him and  
clung,  
And fallen to her knees when he moved outward, "I swear  
by God," she said, "I will tell him that you have taken  
me  
Against my will, if you go from here before I have spoken.  
You'll not be hurt, Hood, you'll be far off,  
And what he can do to *me* is no matter." He said "You  
have gone mad. Stand up. I will listen." But she  
Feeling at last for the first time some shadow of a power  
To hold and move him would not speak nor stand up, but  
crouched at his feet to enjoy it. At length she lifted  
Wide staring eyes and fever-stained face. "I am very  
happy. I don't know what has told me: some movement  
Or quietness of yours." She embraced his thighs, kneeling  
before him, he felt her breasts against them, her head  
Nuzzling his body, he felt with his hand the fire of her  
throat, "Nothing," he said,  
"Is worse nor more vile than what we are doing." "What?  
With a little . . . sin if you call it . . . kill a great misery?  
No one," she thought, "ever tastes triumph

Until the mouth is rinsed with despair." She sobbed "I  
have found you." But when he had dropped the knife  
at the tree's root

To free his hand, and lay by her side on the drifted fall of  
the crisp oak-leaves and curled brown laurel-leaves,

Then she who had wooed began to resist him, to lengthen  
pleasure. "I have lighted the fire, let me warm my  
hands at it

Before we are burned." The face of her exultation was  
hateful to him. He thought of the knife in the leaves

And caught it toward him and struck the point of the blade  
into the muscle of his thigh. He felt no pain

A moment, and then a lightning of pain, and in the lit  
clearance: "I am not your dog yet," he said easily,

"I am not your thing." He felt her body shudder and turn  
stone above him. "What have you done?" "A half inch

Into the blood," he answered, "I am better." He stood up.  
"You will be grateful

To-morrow, for now we can live and not be ashamed. What  
sort of life would have been left us?" "No life

Is left us," she said from a loose throat.

"This mountain is dry." She stood and whispered "I won't  
do anything mean or troublesome. I pitied my father's

Failures from the heart, but then quietness came." Her  
teeth chattered together, she said "I will now go down

If you will let me?" He followed, limping from the Attis-  
gesture,

Outside the oaks and watched her creep toward the house.

The blood gliding by his knee he rubbed a handful of  
earth

Against the stain in the cloth to embrown the color,

And went faintly to the work he had left.

## IX

### Michal

Came up after a time with meat for the eagle.  
While she fed it they had sunk the grave though shallow  
To the hard rock and ceased. "Have you seen Fera  
Lately?" Hood asked, "she was here wanting some greens  
Because there are no flowers, but seemed to be taken sick  
With grief and went down." "No. I was into the house  
But not up-stairs." "We'd better see how she is.  
Bring down the axe and pick-axe," he said to Acanna,  
"But leave the spades." He stepped short, to conceal  
His lameness. Michal asked him, "What's the long stain?"  
"Sap from the oak-roots, they're full of water."

### They looked for Fera

All over the house and found her lying on the floor  
The far side of her father's bed. Hood watched in terror  
While Michal touched; he thought she had killed  
herself.

He had held an obscure panic by force a prisoner  
All day but now it was worse, it was a wish to be gone,  
"There's nothing I wouldn't give to have gone yesterday.  
Oh, pitiful child." She moved; she was not self-slain. She  
rose

To Michal's tugging hands and was led to bed  
In her own room, hanging back but in silence.  
Toward evening she dressed herself with Concha helping  
In the blue serge that was the darkest she had,  
And went with the others up the hill to the burial.

A man at each corner carried the oblong box,  
Cawdor and his sons and Dante Vitello. But Hood was  
lame,

And when his left foot slipped on a stone his right  
Failed with the weight. The stiff unseasonable  
Calla lilies that Michal had found by water  
Fell down the tilted lid; she gathered them up,  
And when the box was lowered into its place  
Dropped them upon it. Jesus Acanna had brought  
The cords to use for lowering. All was done awkwardly  
By shame-faced people, and the eagle watched from the  
cage.

The coffin grounding like a shored boat, the daughter  
Of the tired passenger sighed, she leaned in the blindness  
Of sand-gray eyes behind Michal toward Hood.  
Her hand touched his, he trembled and stepped aside  
Beyond Concha Rosas. Then Fera pressed her knuckles to  
her mouth  
And went down the hill; the others remained.

Because of the dug earth heaped at the oak's foot  
They were all standing on the west side the grave  
Or at either end, a curious group, Cawdor's gray head the  
tallest,  
Nine, to count Concha's child,  
Intent, ill at ease, like bewildered cattle nosing one fallen.  
Not one of them, now that Fera was gone,  
Had any more than generic relation to the dead; they were  
merely man contemplating man's end,  
Feeling some want of ceremony.

The sky had been overcast; between the  
ocean and the cloud  
Was an inch slit, through which the sun broke suddenly at  
setting, only a fraction of his passing face,

But shone up the hill from the low sea's rim a reddening fire  
from a pit. The shadows of the still people  
Lay like a bundle of rods, over the shallow grave, up the  
red mound of earth, and upward  
The mass of the oak; beyond them another shadow,  
Broad, startling and rectilinear, was laid from the eagle's  
cage; nine slender human shadows and one  
Of another nature.

Jesus Acanna

Saw something like a jewel gleam in the rays  
On the heap of surface earth at his feet; he stooped  
And picked it up; a knife-edged flake of wrought  
Chalcedony, the smooth fracture was pleasant to feel.  
He stood and fondled it with his fingers, not mindful  
That his own people had chipped it out and used it  
To scrape a hide in their dawn or meat from a shell.

Then Cawdor made a clearing noise in his throat  
And said in heavy embarrassment: "We know nothing of  
God, but we in our turn shall discover death.  
It might be good to stand quietly a moment, before we fill  
in the dirt, and so if anyone  
Is used to praying"—he looked at Concha and Ilaria—  
"might say it in their minds." They stood with their  
eyes lowered,  
And Cawdor took up a shovel and said impatiently  
"Let us fill in." The sun was gone under the wine-colored  
ocean, then the deep west fountained  
Unanticipated magnificences of soaring rose and heavy  
purple, atmospheres of flame-shot  
Color played like a mountain surf, over the abrupt coast,  
up the austere hills,

On the women talking, on the men's bent forms filling the  
grave, on the oak, on the eagle's prison, one glory  
Without significance pervaded the world.

Fera had gone down  
To the emptied room in the vacant house to do  
What she had imagined in the afternoon. In the pain of  
her mind  
Nothing appeared fantastic; she had thought of a way  
To trick death from the hands that refused life.  
From Hood's own hands. She'd not be forgotten. She  
drew  
The mountain-lion skin from where it was crumpled  
away,  
And clothed herself in it, the narrow shoulders  
Over her shoulders, the head over her head.  
She bound it with bits of string, and smoothed the  
wrinkles.  
It would fool a hunter in the twilight; only her face  
Must be turned from him. She fled from the house and hid  
In the oaks against the hill, not far from the door.  
The rosy light had waned from the cloud, wilderness-  
hearted  
Twilight was here, embrowning the leaves and earth.  
Concha and Ilaria and Concha's child came talking  
And entered the house; kitchen windows were lighted.  
The others delayed. Blue smoke began to veil out  
And be fragrant among the leaves. She crouched in the  
oak-bush,  
As every evening the wild lives of the mountain  
Come down and lie watching by lonely houses.

Hood, when they took the redwood box to the house,

Had left his rifle in the stable, he came with Michal,  
Having fetched it. They walked mournfully together,  
For this was their last evening, he'd leave at dawn  
For the free north. But nothing remained to say;  
And through their silence, drawing near the house-door,  
Michal

Heard the stiff oak-leaves move, she looked and perceived  
A life among them, laying her hand on his arm  
She pointed with the other hand. The head and slant  
shoulder

And half the side unsheathed themselves from the oak,  
The hindquarters were hidden. The long beast lifted  
On straightened fore-legs and stood quartering away,  
The head raised, turned up the canyon. Hood held his fire,  
Astonished at it, wasn't it one of the dogs?  
Both dogs were splatched with white, the brindle was  
dead,

No white on this, and light enough yet remained  
To show the autumn color and the hair's texture;  
Here were the paws that killed the brindle and the calf;  
In vain hunted; chance-met.

But Fera supposed

His weapon was in his room in the house, he'd slip  
Into the house to fetch it and she'd have fled  
When he returned; hunting alone up the twilight hill  
Might he not even now discover a woman  
In the beast's hide, pity that woman? Already in her mind  
She wavered away from the necessity of death;  
If Michal had not been present she might have stood up  
And shown . . .  
The stroke that ended her thought was aimed too low.  
In the hunter's mind a more deep-chested victim

Stood in the dusk to be slain; what should have  
transpierced  
The heart broke the left arm-bone against the shoulder  
And spared the life.

He knew, as she fell. He seemed to himself  
To have known even while he fired. That worm of terror  
Strangled his mind so that he kept no memory  
Of Cawdor and the others taking her into the house.  
He was left in the dark with a bruised face, someone had  
struck him,  
Oh, very justly.

He rose and stood reeling  
Like a boy whom bad companions have filled with  
sweetened  
Liquor, to make him their evening sport. The yellow  
Windows of the house wavered, he fought the sickness  
And went in-doors. Someone stared at him passing  
Up-stairs; he heard from the door her moaning breath.  
Cawdor examined the wound, George held the lamp  
Over the naked arm and breast, Concha  
Was dipping a sponge: it was the dark clot  
Stringing from the red sponge that overcame him.  
Cawdor's face, like a rock to break on, turned  
To say hoarsely "You bastard, get out of this place,"  
And turned back to the wound; terrible face in the lamp-  
shadow  
Black as the blood-clot.

He stood outside the door  
Half fainting against the wall. Wanted him to go?  
Good God, did he want to stay? Michal came whispering:

"You can't do anything here; and I am afraid of father.  
Please go. Please go. To-morrow I'll meet you somewhere.  
Oh, what can you do here?"

While he limped on the stairway  
Fera's moan sharpened and became a voice.  
He found himself out of doors; the blanket-roll  
He had rolled ready to start to-morrow at dawn  
Was in his hand. He looked for his rifle  
On the ground between the shot and the mark, and  
stumbled over it  
After he had failed to find it.

The sky had cleared  
With its local suddenness, full of nail-sharp stars  
And a frosty dust of shining; he went up the dim star-path  
By the lone redwood into wide night. His usurped mind  
Unheeding itself ran in its track of habit,  
So that he went from the oaks as before, upward  
The gravelly slope of spoiled granite to the Rock.  
He soon gathered dead twigs and kindled a fire  
On the dome of the Rock, wishing Michal might see it  
And bring him word in the morning. The night had turned  
Frostily cold with its cleared sky.

## X

Fera's moan became vocal, she flapped the  
hurt arm, the hand  
Lying still and hooked, the marbled flesh working between  
the shoulder and the elbow. Michal remembered  
Her eagle in the fresh of its wound waving the broken flag:  
another one of Hood's rifle-shots. Cawdor

Gripped the shoulder quiet with his hand, and clinked in  
the basin

From his right hand the small red splinter of bone he had  
fished from the wound. Fera's eye-lids, that hung

Half open on arcs of opaque white, widened suddenly, and  
fluttered shut, and stood wide open,

The liquid pools of night in the rayed gray rings dilating  
and contracting like little hearts,

Each sparked with a minute image of the lamp above  
them. She tongued her lips and the dry teeth

And moved her head. "This must be life, this hot pain.

Oh, the bad hunter! I fail in everything, like my father."

Cawdor looked sideways to place in his mind

The strips of a torn sheet laid ready, and smooth straight  
sticks of pinewood kindling fetched from the kitchen;

He pressed a ragful of pungent liquid to the wound's  
mouths. Fera lay quiet, but Michal trembled

To see her lips retract from the teeth, and hear the teeth  
creaking together. Then Fera whispered:

"Horse-liniment. Of course you would. It burns." But

Cawdor answered: "Hold the lamp, Michal. George,  
hold her quiet."

He gripped with his hands the shoulder and the upper  
arm. Then Fera: "Oh God! Oh no! No . . . no . . .

I'll tell you anything . . ." The ends of the fracture were  
heard touching; but she writhing her body whipped  
over

In George's and Concha's hands; Cawdor held without  
failure but her movement baffled him, the ends of bone

Were heard slipping. He shifted his grasp and said to the  
others, "Loose-handed fools. Hold firm." But Fera

Straining her chalky and diminished face, the earth-stain  
still unwashed on her cheek, clear of the pillow:

"Oh, please. Dearest! I'll not hide anything. I'm not to  
 blame." His mind was fixed on his work, yet even  
 While his muscles were setting themselves again her  
 words entered his understanding. His grip relaxed;  
 He looked at her face, the eyes stared bright terror but  
 the mouth  
 Attempting a fawning smile: "I'll tell you everything,  
 dearest, but don't torture me. I thought I had tasted  
 Torture before. How little I knew." Her teeth chattered  
 together and she said "He forced me. Hood forced me.  
 He threw me down under the laurel tree  
 And stopped my mouth with his hand. So that I couldn't  
 be your wife any more, darling. But I  
 Never loved him. I only tried to be killed. Oh, Oh, his face  
 Is like a nigger's. George, save me! Michal!" He sighed,  
 "You lie. Be quiet." "Darling," she pleaded, "I feel  
 Pain so much more than you understand. I can't *bear*  
 pain? *Bear* pain? I am not made like the people  
 You're used to." He wavered his head as if a fringe hung  
 over the eyes, and bent to the wound, but she:  
 "I only tried to be killed." He muttered, "I don't kill  
 women." And Fera: "You'd be so kind. Oh,  
 But the darkness was sweet." And feeling his hands, "Oh,  
 Concha," she cried, "I've told him everything and  
 yet he'll hurt me.  
 Dear Concha pray to him for me, he used to love you. And  
 I have never been mean to you because of that,  
 Concha." Then Cawdor suddenly turned to the Indian  
 woman: "Is it true, what she says?" But Michal:  
 "No, no,  
 Her mind," she stammered, "gone wrong. Ah, you coward,  
 Fera." "And what part," Cawdor said, "had *you* in  
 the play?

By God, you all . . . When?" he said hoarsely to Fera.  
 "Before he died," she answered, her breath hissing  
 In little pulses. He gathered his strength and said, "Out,  
 Michal." And when she had gone: "Was it in this room,  
 Or his?" She answered "Under the laurel tree  
 He threw me down: I was not to blame not to blame more  
 Than a murdered man is." George said, "She is lying. Her  
 madness is fear of pain. She is sick." "Though I've  
 been played  
 For the fool of the world I know more than that. They  
 make lies for pleasure but not  
 Get killed for pleasure. You sick whore, does it hurt? Here  
 is a different bed from the brown leaves  
 And the panting dog." Her face looking no bigger than a  
 broken doll's on the pillow answered: "I knew  
 You'd kill me, I didn't think torture, why must I suffer  
 alone? If I am to blame a little is he  
 Not rich with blame? He has got away I suppose. I swear  
 by God I never consented to him.  
 It was all violence, violence . . . Have pity: no pity?  
 Sweetheart: I never called you before: Sweetheart,  
 Have mercy on me." He stood as if to go out of the room;  
 he was heard breathing, and slowly his hands  
 Crept to his throat. He turned and came back and said:  
 "It is not to punish you.  
 I must set the bone. You can't stay here and be kept,  
 you'll need both arms to live with. I will use all  
 Gentleness: but you lie still, it will be done in a moment.  
 I'll send for the doctor, but when he comes  
 It will be too swollen perhaps for mending. Indeed I have  
 other business. People take pain like bread  
 When their life needs it. After it is set the ache  
 Will quiet, you'll sleep."

Michal, outside the door,  
Heard her screaming and went in; but then she had  
fainted

And Cawdor worked more easily. He bound the arm  
And set the splints, and bound it again, and passed  
A leather belt about her body to fasten it  
Against her side. He looked then at her face,  
The dark lashes lying still, the parted white lips  
Pencilled at the borders with fine blue lines,  
Meek as a child's after the turn of fever  
Folds its weakness in sleep. Concha prepared  
To bathe the face, but Cawdor: "Let her alone.  
Let her have the poor mercy while it lasts.  
Come George, I'll help you saddle. He'll come sooner  
For you than another." He spoke quietly, but  
leaving

The room he walked against the wall by the door  
And spread his hands both ways to feel the door-frame  
Before he went out. He ran and found Hood's room  
Empty, before he went with George to the stable.  
"I think it has cleared," he said in the dark, "aren't the  
stars out?"

He saw the red star of Hood's fire on the Rock.  
"Take your pick of the horses: I must go back  
And warn the women: she will wake in delirium  
And strain the bandages loose: I didn't speak of that,  
That I remember? That I remember? Good-night,"  
He said eagerly. He turned, then George went down  
Alone, but Cawdor up the hill to the Rock  
As one tortured with thirst toils up the sand-hills  
To the known rock spring. When he issued from the  
oaks

On the ridge of the steep neck of air-crumbled granite

The canyon redwoods were a stain of black shade  
In the pit below, the gleam-powdered sky soared out of  
conception,

The starlight vastness and steepness were narrow to him  
And no wind breathed. He was like one threading a tunnel  
With anguished hunger of the air and light, all the arrows  
Of desire strung to their heads on the pale spark  
Of day at the end: so all the needs of his life  
Hung on the speck of humanity by the red embers  
On the rock dome. It heard him, and twitched and stood  
up.

He made in his mouth and waterless throat the words  
"Come down," but no sound issued; he came nearer and  
said

"What did you steal? Come down." Hood screamed  
"Keep off,"

The same panic of brainless fear returning,  
With a horror of his own cowardice, how could he bear  
To run, but how could he bear to stand? He imagined  
Fera had died. His very innocence of evil  
Made the avenger unbearable, one of those hands  
Could break his body, he snatched his rifle and stood  
On the other side of the embers and sobbed "Stop there.  
By God if you come nearer I'll fire. Keep off your hands.  
I'm not hiding, I'll answer the law, not you.  
I can't . . . Keep off. Oh! Oh!" For Cawdor blindly  
Came through the fire; Hood with the rifle at his waist  
Unshouldered, flung up the muzzle and shot in the air  
Over his father's head: at the flash Cawdor  
Felt a bright fear, not of death but of dying mocked,  
Overreached and outraged, as a fool dies,  
Explode on his mind like light breaking on blindness  
So that the body leaped and struck while the mind

Astonished with hatred stood still. There had been no  
choice,  
Nor from the first any form of intention.  
He saw Hood's body roll away from the fire  
Like a thing with no hands; he felt in the knuckles  
Of both his hands that both had been bruised on bone,  
He saw Hood's body twist on the fall of the dome  
Over the precipice and hands like weak flames  
Scratch at the starlight rock: then one sharp moment's  
Knife-edge a shadow of choice appeared: for all  
Passed in a moment: he might have dived prone  
And clutched after the hands with his hands: more likely  
Gone down the granite slide into the gulf  
With the other: but the choice had no consciousness  
And in a moment, no choice. There was no cry.  
The curving hands scrabbled on the round of the rock  
And slipped silently down, into so dreadful a depth  
That no sound of the fall: nothing returned:  
Mere silence, mere vanishing. Cawdor could hear the water  
Whispering below, and saw the redwood forest  
A long irregular stain in the starlit gorge-bottom,  
But over the round of the rock it was not possible  
To see the foot of the Rock. A little steady breeze  
Blew curving up over the granite verge  
From the night's drift in the chasm.

He turned and walked  
Stealthily away, yet firmly, feeling no horror  
But only a hollow unbearable sadness. But Hood had  
earned  
The death he had got: not that he'd used violence  
In adultery, that was incredible, the woman had lied:  
But the crime however invited had no forgiveness,

Not even in death. Women are not responsible;  
They are like children, little children grown lewd;  
Men must acknowledge justice or their world falls  
Piecemeal to dirty decay. Justice had been  
Performed. He felt the sapping unbearable sadness  
A little lightened, so muttered "Justice. Justice.  
Justice": but the third time of saying it the word  
Was pithed of meaning and became useless. He had come  
Half way to the house and there remembered the things  
Left on the Rock. He returned. Only his knowledge  
Of what lay at the foot prevented him then  
From casting himself down. Nor could he cast the rifle,  
The silly rifle that Hood had loved,  
For fear of its falling on the poor damned face.  
He stood between the blanket-roll and the rifle  
Beside a few burnt sticks and scattered red coals  
On the bulge of the Rock. "Well, I have killed my son."

Whether he continued living or quit living,  
It would be a pity Michal should know. Quit, because it  
hurts? He thought he was not the make to do that.  
His recent real temptation appeared a contemptible  
flourish of play-acting. "Well, I have killed my son.  
He needed killing." The woman's story of the rape was  
now believed; it had become needful  
To believe her story. "I will take these and bury them  
with him." When he'd again gone under the oaks  
He heard one coming up the dark path. A moment of  
stupid horror he dreamed it was Hood coming  
To claim the rifle. But Michal, no doubt, Michal. He laid  
the things he carried into the darkness  
Of the oaks by the path, and hardened his mind to meet  
Michal. Meet . . . whom? It brushed against the stiff  
leaves

Like something broken that crept and rested. With no  
terror but pity going down in the dark to meet it  
He heard it snort and stamp hooves, a stray horse plunged  
from the path. "God damn you," he said and a voice  
answered

From down the path: "Hood, is that you?" She had been  
coming up to the Rock, and the strayed horse  
Drifting ahead. She said "One of the horses: I guess it's  
gone. O Hood, Fera has said

Frightful . . . where are you?" She cried sharply "Who is  
that?" "The things were true," he answered, "all  
true." He heard her

Stop, and he seemed to feel her trembling. "Where's  
Hood," she said in a moment, trembling, "what have  
you done?"

"Nothing." He said in his heart "Well: I have killed  
him?" He possessed his voice in quietness and said,  
"I came

To ask him the truth, and he has confessed. It was all  
true." She sobbed and said "What have you done  
with him?"

"Nothing," he answered indifferently. "He ran when I  
came. A guilty conscience, Michal. He has done a  
thing

Never forgiven." He had reached her now; in the starless  
night of the oaks he saw the gleam of her face

Retreating, she moving slowly backward before him. He  
said "Like the scut of a deer." "What?" "When I  
came

He streaked up the hill into the starlight." "How did you  
make him confess?" "Oh Michal, a guilty conscience.  
That does it. You know he wasn't a coward by nature, not  
a damned coward. I saw him run like a rabbit-scut

Between the hill and the stars. Come up to the Rock and  
call him." "I thought I heard a gun-shot," she  
faltered.

"I was in the house with . . . Then I went out." "A gun-  
shot? No. Come up and call him; perhaps he'll come  
down.

I promise you not to touch him. Come up and call to him,  
Michal. If you call loudly." They climbed to the Rock.

She saw it was vacant, the ends of a few sticks glowed on  
the stone, pale in their ash-crusts. "Hood. Hood,"

She called, and he said "Call louder. He has gone far."

She answered,

"No, I won't call. I wish never to see him."

Who lay under the sheer below them, his broken shoulders  
Bulging his coat in lumps the starlight regarded.

The bone vessel where all the nerves had met

For counsel while they were living, and the acts and  
thoughts

Been formed, was burst open, its gray and white jellies

Flung on the stones like liquor from a broken flask,

Mixed with some streamers of blood.

The vivid consciousness

That waking or dreaming, its twenty years, infallibly

Felt itself unitary, was now divided:

Like the dispersion of a broken hive: the brain-cells

And rent fragments of cells finding

After their communal festival of life particular deaths.

In their deaths they dreamed a moment, the unspent  
chemistry

Of life resolving its powers; some in the cold star-gleam

Some in the cooling darkness in the crushed skull.

But shine and shade were indifferent to them, their dreams  
Determined by temperatures, access of air,  
Wetness or drying, as the work of the autolytic  
Enzymes of the last hunger hastened or failed.

Yet there appeared, whether by chance or whether  
From causes in their common origin and recent union,  
A rhythmic sympathy among the particular dreams.  
A wave of many minute delicious enjoyments  
Would travel across the spilt; then a sad fading  
Would follow it, a wave of infinitesimal pains,  
And a pause, and the pleasures again. These waves both  
lessened

In power and slowed in time; the fragments of  
consciousness

Beginning to lapse out of the frailties of life  
And enter another condition. The strained peace  
Of the rock has no repose, it is wild and shuddering, it  
travels

In the teeth of locked strains unimaginable paths;  
It is full of desire; but the brittle iniquities of pleasure  
And pain are not there. These fragments now approached  
What they would enter in a moment, the peace of the  
earth.

## XI

When Cawdor had left the house, Concha  
At once busied herself to recall to life  
The milk-faced bandaged one on the bed, then Michal  
Had intervened: "He said to let her alone.  
He said to let her have peace." But Concha: "She stay  
Fainting too long, she stop breathing, she die."

"I think that would be better." But the Indian woman Trembling went on, then Michal held up the basin While the other bathed the pale face, gray jewels of water Ran down in the hair. There was no response; then Michal Herself began to be frightened. She knew that her father Had kept a bottle of whiskey somewhere in the room; She set the basin on the blue chair and went Searching on shelves.

Concha flung back the sheet  
And blanket to bathe the breast. How the hard strap  
That held the arm furrowed the flesh of the waist.  
The fine-grained clear white skin was beautiful to her;  
The coins of rose about the small nipples  
Astonished her; hers were as black as the earth; she  
dipped her head  
As if to a flower's fragrance and felt the quiet breasts  
She had cooled with water move on her face: Fera  
Moaned and then said faintly, "You are blind, father.  
Both horses were white." She moved her head on her hair,  
Her voice changed: "Do you love me, Concha? You never  
were jealous,  
I've wondered at you. Where's Cawdor?" Michal returned  
And said sullenly: "I've found it, and there's no glass.  
She'd better suck from the bottle." But Fera lay  
Regardless of her, and dropping her right forearm  
Across her breast, explored the splints, and folds  
On heavy folds of linen that shelled the shoulder  
And the left arm; then with pain-dwindled lips,  
"Well," she said, "give it to me. It's time for me now  
To taste of my father's friend. Help me sit up, Concha."  
She sipped and choked; it spilled on her chin, the burning  
fragrance

Filled all the room. Michal took back the bottle  
And said, "Why did you lie? You lied. You lied  
Horrible things." Fera, dull-eyed, with racked mouth,  
The coughing had hurt her arm: "Not lies. Every word  
Faithful as death. I lay between your father and your  
brother

Like a snake between the rock and the stone.  
Give me the bottle, give it back to me Michal.  
I have to hush this torment. Your father'll come back .  
And beat me with his fists like a wild beast,  
He's like a beast in his rages." "Every word's lies.  
But if it were true, why did you tell him?" "Because he  
tortured me."

Michal crossed the room to the corner and saw  
In the east window high up in the dark pane  
A little drop of red light. She pressed her face  
Against the glass and cupped it with her two hands  
To shut the lamplight away. Hood's waning fire,  
Like a red star under the diamond stars.  
"I'll go and ask him," she said turning. "He'll tell me  
Every last word was a lie." "What did you see, Oh what  
did you see, Michal?"

Fera said shaking, "A fire on the Rock? It's only some  
vaquero from inland, Hood wouldn't build one,  
Not to-night, not to-night." She answered "I saw nothing.  
I saw the sky and some stars. Concha,

Take care of her, will you. Get her to sleep." As Michal  
crossed to the door a dim noise like a gun-shot  
Seemed to be heard, she said "Oh, what was that?

Concha: you heard it? Listen." But Fera laughing  
With an ashen face: "Lived here all her life long  
And never has heard a wave slapping the sand at the  
creek-mouth."

When she'd gone out, Fera said: "Concha,  
My father's blindness was crystal to hers. How could she  
stay in the room and let Cawdor go out  
To find his prey in the night? Did she know *nothing*? Give  
me the bottle, dear Concha. Dear Concha." She  
drank,  
And said: "I'd no other way to keep him, he was going  
away. Poor hunter. I set a beast on his track  
That he's no match for. The gun's no good, boy hunter,  
you might as well toss acorns. Two bulls, Concha,  
Fighting by starlight, the young one is gored. Ah: Concha:  
One of my loves was locked in the hill by the oak, now the  
other's safe too. Listen: my birthday's to-night.  
Has to be kept," she stammered, "I've told no one but  
you. And here's my father's friend to sit up with.  
Go down and get two glasses, Concha, and a pitcher of  
water." She called her back from the door. "Concha!  
The water in the house is all stale.  
Go out to the spring among the calla lilies  
And fill the pitcher. Don't hurry, Concha, I'm resting  
now."

As Concha went out Fera stealthily  
Undid the belt that locked her arm to her side; when the  
Indian was gone  
She passed one-handed the strap through the buckle, the  
tongue thrown back  
To let it slide free. She knotted the end of the strap  
To the top of the carved bed-post, kneeling on the pillow,  
Tightening the knot between her hand and her teeth.  
She dropped the collar about her neck, and shuffled her  
knees  
Until they slipped from the mattress. The right arm

Sustained the left one, to ease its pain in the fall.  
She could have breathed by standing, but while her mind  
Remained she would not, and then was unable.

Concha, down-stairs,  
Had much to tell Ilaria. Acanna was there too  
In the kitchen, and Concha's boy Romano, and Dante  
Vitello, the Swiss. All questioned her. She'd forgotten  
The water and found the glasses, when little Romano  
In his child voice: "Escucha: un raton.—Listen mother,  
A mouse in the ceiling." But no one looked up nor down  
Until he fetched the gray cat from under the stove  
And wanted to take her up-stairs. Concha forbade him,  
But listened, and heard the noise in the ceiling change  
From a soft stroking to a dull shudder in the wood.  
The shudder was Fera's agony; the backs of her feet  
Stroking the floor; she hung as if kneeling. But Concha  
said:  
"A trade-rat maybe: no mouse. But I must go up."  
The noise had ceased.

She screamed in the hallway above  
And flung the glasses on the floor. The people below  
Stared at each other. Her cries were timed, rhythmic,  
Mechanical, like a ground-squirrel's when he sits up  
Beside his burrow and watches a dog hunting  
On the other side of the fence. At length Acanna  
Ran to the stair, the others followed, and little Romano  
With gray puss in his arms. They looked past Concha,  
Who stood in the door not daring to enter.

The girl  
Appeared kneeling, only her knees were lifted

A little above the floor; her head devoutly  
Drooped over. She was naked but the bandaged arm;  
The coins about the small nipples were now  
As black as Concha's; the lips dark, the fine skin  
Mottled with lead-color. Ilaria pushed in and lifted  
The body, Jesus Acanna then found his knife  
And cut the strap. They stretched the slender body  
On the bed and began to talk, but Dante Vitello  
Remembered at length to pump the ribs with his hands.  
They saw the lids of the eyes after a time  
Flutter and close; the Swiss paused from his labor,  
The breathing went on by itself.

Cawdor returned  
From the Rock with Michal, but would not enter the  
house.  
He seemed going toward the sea when she left him. He  
went  
As far as the work-shop and fetched tools for digging,  
A lantern, matches to light it. He chose the tools  
With a clear mind; this work had to be done  
Because of the coyotes. It proved more dreadful  
Than he'd imagined; but when it was done the  
dreadfulness itself  
Had purged his mind of emotion. He took no pains  
To conceal the grave, for at this time discovery  
Meant nothing to him, he desired nor feared nothing,  
Not even to put back time and undo an act.  
However, no person ever went up there.  
He rolled stones on the grave against the coyotes,  
And gathered the tools, but when he had carried them  
Half way home, he threw them with the lantern too  
Into the creek under the starless redwoods.

His mind ceased there, as if the tools had been strings  
Between the world and his mind; these cut, it closed.

In the bright of dawn, before sunrise began,  
The lank steers wheeled their line when he waved his arms.  
He cursed them with obscene words . . . but why? . . . and  
there stood

Thirty in a row, all in a row like soldiers  
Staring at him with strained-up heads. He was in the  
pasture

On the highest dome of the hill.

Wild fragrant wind blew from the burning east,  
A handful of cloud high up in the air caught fire and  
vanished.

A point of more excessive light appeared  
On the ridge by the lone oak and enlarged.  
Without doubt, the sun. But if it were the horn of a  
flaming beast:

We'd have a horned beast to see by.

"What have I lost by doing through a blind accident  
What I ought to have done in cold blood? Was Hood  
anything to me?

I have lost nothing." He'd have counted Fera  
Lost, if he'd thought of Fera; she did not enter his mind.  
"If I'd lost much: it's likely I'd not lie down  
But gather again and go on." His flesh and bones were  
soaked

With aching weariness: but that was nothing either.

His eyes dazzled in the rivers of light

And the sea lay at his feet flat and lifeless

Far down, but flecked with the steps of the wind. He went  
down to the house

And heard that Fera had hanged herself and been saved,

But that was nothing either. No, something. "Where were you?"

He said to Concha. "She send me down. She send me. She send me down for water. When I come back: Oh!"

"I'll not see her this morning," he answered.

"Bring my clothes to the little room on the north,  
And change the bed there. Hood's gone for good." He had  
done justly,

And could sleep very well there.

Two days passed

Before he remembered the blanket-roll and the rifle  
Dropped in the oaks when Michal came. He went and  
sought

But never found them. But that was nothing either.

## XII

Her voice was still roughened with an off whisper  
In the bruised throat, and the white of one of her eyes  
Grained with a drop of red, a little blood-vessel  
Had broken there when the strap drew. When she was  
alone

She lay pointed on the bed, stiffened to the attitude  
Of formal death, feeling the ache in her arm  
But hardly conscious of it, the hours and scenes  
And the form as a whole of all her life incessantly  
Moving behind the blank wide open eyes.  
She lay and contemplated it with little emotion  
And hardly a thought. She thought of herself as dead.  
Although she knew perfectly that she was living,  
And had said to Concha: "You needn't watch me, you  
and Ilaria.

I'll never try death again, now I understand  
That to fail is the very soul of my soul.  
Failure is not so sweet that one who feels it  
Beforehand will go running to meet it again.  
Though death is sweet. That will come in its time,  
When I'm as old as my father, I fear not sooner;  
Never for the asking."

She said to Concha another day:  
"I wish you could get Michal to come and see me;  
Or George even. Not one soul has come in,  
Not since the doctor was here, and death is so lonesome.  
I could get up, but when I begin to walk  
Cawdor will send me away. You must never tell them  
That I can get up." This was at noon; Concha  
Painfully made a slow thought in her mind  
All afternoon, and said to Cawdor in the evening,  
Stammering, because her words were planned beforehand:  
"She say that she is well enough to get up."  
"Who says?" "Oh . . . she . . ." "You mean," he said  
frowning,  
"My wife? Let her get up then." She turned sadly, and  
then said:  
"When she get up you going to send her away?"  
"What is that to you?" Then Concha recklessly: "You  
keep her  
After she loving with Hood?" She curved her body  
In fear of his hand; but he took hold of her wrist  
And drove her up the stairway to Fera's room.

Who lay in the bed straightened to the shape of death  
And looked at them with still eyes; the scarlet drop  
In the white of the left one spoiled her eyes' peace. Cawdor

Put off the questions that had burned him to ask,  
And stood still and then said: "You are well enough to  
get up,  
Concha says, but you think I'd send you away."  
She smiled at Concha. "I wondered whether you'd do it.  
And then I thought you wouldn't, but it's no matter.  
No: you won't send me," she said to Cawdor, "for I  
Suffered my destruction in simple innocence.  
Oh, certainly you'll not drink again from a mouthed  
cup,  
But the cup's not blamed. You are much too just to punish  
the cup. There are more reasons." His face a moment  
Was like her father's a scar; it formed itself to be dark  
metal again and he said: "No doubt  
You were loving with him and so he went mad." She  
thought, and answered: "No. You did justice. I know  
what you did.  
You'd better send out your brown tattle-tales  
Before we say any more, she'd hear and go tell, wouldn't  
you Concha? Besides that her sour odor  
Poisons the room. I've noticed lately, the living smell  
much worse than the dead. Oh, never mourn them;  
No one was ever sorry to have died." He shook his head,  
like the bull that has charged a man and found  
Only the vacant flapping of a red blanket, and he said:  
"Be straight will you for once, I won't hurt you.  
You hide in a smoke of words like lies. Perhaps"—his face  
hollowed with terror—"it was all a lie?  
No, that can't be. You white poison, you were in the boat  
with him and lied  
To save your skin?" He turned on Concha: "Did you see  
her make love to him?" But the Indian woman feared  
to go on;

She shook her head, and looked aside at Fera, and shook  
her head. Cawdor made himself patient  
And said, "Perhaps a kiss: or you saw her stroking his  
head: he had fine hair . . ." Fera lay faintly  
Smiling and watched him; he looked, stooping his face to  
Concha's, like a tall old Jew bargaining, and said:  
"Or you saw them . . . by God, you told me they kissed,  
you said that." She nodded her head, panting and  
shrinking backward,  
Wiping her dark hands on her apron incessantly; and  
Fera: "She'll tell more lies if you make more faces,  
And when that fails you could pinch her arm. How can  
you expect truth from such people, they're all afraid  
of you?"  
He looked at Concha and said feebly: "If I could  
know.  
I am stupid and things are hidden. What I have done.  
Was right, but the blood rushes me behind my eyes  
And God sends chance. It all happened in the blindness of  
chance." Fera said quietly "Don't talk before her."  
He looked at her eyes and said, "You have the secret, if I  
could trust you. That red drop comes from hanging  
And will clear up. You seem quieter in mind  
Than ever before. Do you know where I sleep now? Hood's  
room." "It was Concha's first." He groaned in his  
throat, feeling  
That every thought in her mind was impure, how could he  
fish the truth from a dirty fountain? He said:  
"And yet you'll tell me. It will make no difference to you  
but only to me. I will do nothing to punish you,  
Whatever you say, nothing in your favor either." "I've  
told you already," she answered. "But whether you  
tempted him,

Invited him, you egged him on, you thought he was safe.  
 A word: or only a damned smile: women  
 Can move hell with their eyes." She closed her eyes, and  
 said, keeping them closed: "What I said that night  
 Each word was true. You're right though, I've still a  
 secret. Shoo tattle-tales out,  
 And then I'll tell you my secret." He said, "Concha: get  
 out." She sighed and went out gladly, and Fera:  
 "Open the door; I won't have her at the door." However  
 the hallway was empty, and Fera said:  
 "I was friendly with him, he was your son and Michal's  
 brother. I never in act nor look nor thought  
 Stepped over that. Was he vicious when he was little? I  
 never knew it. A beast lived in his blood,  
 But no one warned me and now he is gone." "That's the  
 word: gone. You are safe to blacken him, he can't  
 answer."  
 "If I should lie and whiten him," she said,  
 "And say he was innocent, some stitch of his nerves in  
 him destroyed me but his heart was innocent: and  
 you believed it:  
 How could you sleep? And after a night or two  
 That room you have taken might seem too little for you.  
 You are very strong, you'd hold yourself quiet three  
 night,  
 Or four nights, and then wander on the hill scaring the  
 cattle." He said gravely, "Does every one know?  
 Who told you this?" "No one," she answered. "And after  
 a week of nights they'd find you with those big-boned  
 Fingers clenched in your throat quiet on the hill." "On  
 the Rock," he said. "Oh, on the Rock. But since . . .  
 Or under the Rock. But since he was guilty you can sleep  
 sound." The flesh of his face, that had sagged lately,

Was now become firm for danger, and he asked: "How do you know these things if no one watched me?" She answered,

"I know you so well. I used to be near you, if you remember, before I was spoiled. And now, lying Like this"—she lay pointed in the bed, her arms on her breast—"I mean alone and cut off from life, I've had leisure and power to think of you plainly, so all your acts that night stand in my mind Fixed and forever like pieces of stone. That's the way with us dead, we see things whole and never Wonder at things." He said, "You lie here and dream and imagine. There's nothing in it." "So you won't send me,"

She answered, "to stay with strangers. I know too much and might tell: that's nothing to you: but as time darkens

You'll find me the only comforter you have. And I can teach you the way to blessedness: I've tasted life And tasted death; the one's warm water, yellow with mud and wrigglers, sucked from a puddle in the road, Or hot water that scalds you to screaming; The other is bright and cool and quiet, drawn from the deep. You knocked the scummed cup from the boy's hand

And gave him the other: is that a thing to be sorry for? I know; I have both in my hands; life's on the broken And splinted left, so I never lift it. You did kindly, not terribly. If you were wise, you'd do As much for yourself. If you were loving you'd do As much for me." He stood and listened, and said "Is that all?"

She nodded. "Then it's not much.

I see there are two of us here twisting in hell,  
Smile as you like." "Why yes," she answered, "by the  
left arm.

That's true. But I taste both." He was leaving the room  
And she cried after him: "Oh my dear, dear, be merciful.  
Life is so tough to cut, I never would have dreamed.  
*I fail. But nothing stops you.*"

He went out-doors  
And felt a seeming-irresistible desire  
To go to the foot of the Rock and lie with those stones  
On the soft earth, his mouth whispering against it.  
But now, he must never give in to any desire;  
Strain the iron forever. Never do anything strange:  
For even now their eyes followed him strangely.  
No matter; they'd keep in subjection; they might have  
watched it  
And not dare speak: but a pity if little Michal . . .  
The stars in the sparse boughs, the skies are never  
Darkened any more, a naughty glitter.  
How does one commonly spend a winter evening:  
Not letting the stars glitter through the split boughs.  
He entered the house and sat down. Strain the iron forever:  
He had strength for that.

Fera had little strength,  
And the long hollow night coming looked unendurable.  
Her right arm was flung free of the cover and lay  
Bent on her eyes; after a while her teeth  
Found the wrist: ugh, what was this? She raised it and  
saw  
The yellow and brown scabs of the laceration  
Where she had gnawed it before.

In the morning, when Concha  
Came in to serve her, she said "Did you believe in heaven  
and hell

When you were little? (To-day I'll get up,  
I've had enough of this bed, you'll help me dress.)  
Because you know the dead rarely come back;  
But I died and came back, and I can tell you  
More than the priests know. Dying's not bad: Oh, bad  
enough,

But you can stand it, you have to. But afterwards . . . Ah,  
there's . . ."

She moaned, her tight small fist crept up to her cheek  
And trembled there. She was playing a comedy, she  
played it so well

Her own flesh suffered and chilled. "Death is no sleep,  
Concha, death is eternal torment and terror  
For all that die. Neither is there any heaven for anyone. I  
saw my father there crying blood  
From the hollows of his blind eyes and tearing his beard  
with his hands. He said 'Oh my God have you come,  
Fera?

Who ever dreamed that death could be worse than life?'  
I said 'It is so,' and all the crowd of the dead  
Began moaning 'It is so.' But then you managed to make  
me breathe with your hands and I could come back,  
They said to me then, 'Never tell any living person what  
death is like, for if they imagined "

What it's like, for they all must come, how could they live?  
Who'd not go mad with fear to feel it approaching? '  
Oh Concha, hug life with tooth and nail, for what  
Comes after is the most horrible. And no end, no end.  
(Come here and help me. We'll have to slit down the sleeve  
And pin it over the shoulder.) I didn't tell you

To scare you, Concha. Don't think about it. Ah no,  
Or we'd sit screaming.  
I wasn't going to tell you but then I thought  
That you can bear it as well as I can, after the trick  
You played me last night, my rival!  
Live. Live forever if you could. Oh it was frightful."

### XIII

Though she was up, and began to live and go out,  
She avoided Cawdor's presence, still fearing to be sent  
    away  
If seen too often. She kept her room at meal-times,  
And he was almost never about the house  
The other hours of the day.

    The first time she went out,  
She only walked under the storm-broken cypresses  
About the door and went in; but the next morning  
She climbed the steep to the great oak by the graves.  
Still weak and bloodless, dizzy with climbing, she lay  
Face down on the dug earth, her mouth breathing against it  
And whispering over her father's body below.  
The grave retained its freshness, no rain had fallen  
On the red earth. She heard after a time  
A rustling and scraping noise and raised her head.  
It was Michal's eagle hungrily astir in the cage;  
She used to feed it about this time. Fera  
Saw beak and eyes in the shadow, and the dark square  
Of the box cage against the bright blue shining  
Flat ocean and the arch of sky. She stood up, and walked  
About the oak's bole; she seemed to be counting the  
    graves,

But there were only three; the two ancient ones  
Enclosed with pickets and the raw new one unfenced.

Michal came up with flesh and water for the eagle,  
But Fera stood on the other side of the oak  
Until she had come; then, coming forward from it:  
“Why Michal, how strange to think that all these days,  
No matter what’s happened, you still go on steadily as  
sunrise.

My father dies of old age, I fish for death  
And catch failure again, and Hood . . . but you and the  
sunrises

Go on as if our tears and our deaths were nothing.  
He isn’t glad to see you: I’d have been glad to see you,  
My lonely days in bed, but you never came.”  
Michal had looked over her shoulder, her face  
Growing white as it turned. She turned back to the cage.  
“I didn’t know you were here,” she said, and poured out  
The dirty water from the drinking-basin  
Without turning again. “I see that you hate me,”  
Fera said; “we’ll not speak of that. I see that your father  
Has thought *my* father’s grave not worthy of a mark.  
If the cold charity of the county had buried him  
There’d be a stake with his name.

Yet he was here like a man among cattle,  
The only mind in this ditch.” Michal said nothing,  
But rubbed the white slime from the basin and rinsed it,  
And Fera said, “The oak’s dying, they chopped its  
roots.

Or was it the storm that burned these baby leaves?  
We ought to be friends, Michal.” Michal set in  
The filled basin and shut the door of the cage.  
She opened her lips to speak, and then kept silence,

And Fera said, "You'll listen, my dear, if you won't speak.

Do you think I'll swallow

These white and hating looks as if they were earned?

What have I done? Tried to die? Yes; I tried twice;

And that was stupid, but people are pitied for that, not

hated. You were quite kind my days of sunshine,

And now you peck the feathers from the sick bird."

Michal said trembling, "Oh, no. Not that I'm spiteful,  
Only, I can't understand." "That's true," she answered,  
"how could you?

Your life has been sweet and full of ignorance. But I, when  
my father was drunk in town, would hear my mother  
Take lovers in the house. *There* was somebody to hate.

Yet they were white men;

They weren't the color of Concha . . . no more of that. The  
second time I died I almost made it, you know.

They pumped me alive with their hands and I was born  
again

From the dark air: since then I can understand much that  
was dark before. So you, Michal,

Will understand . . . many things that are dark . . . when  
some wild night kills childhood in you. That's  
coming:

But don't pray for it, my dear.

Oh, Michal that's the reason I so much want you to listen  
to me. The inflamed and dark season

And bitterness will come, and then I dread your saying to  
yourself: 'Fera she hated life; Fera

Preferred death; Fera was wise.' I wasn't; at least you  
mustn't think so. I welched on my fate,

(And failed of course, failure's my root in nature) but I  
am ashamed. So you must listen to me, Michal,

My praise of life, by my dead father, by the dying oak.  
What I've lived has not been lucky you know,  
If I can praise it, who'd not? But how good it is, Michal,  
to live! Good for what? Ah, there's the question.  
For the pleasure of it? Hardly for that. Take your own  
life, mine's marked, mine's worse than usual. Your  
mother  
Lies yonder; you never knew her, you missed the *pleasure*  
of knowing her. You missed the pains too; you might  
have hated her.  
More likely you'd have loved her deeply; you'd have been  
sad then to see her wasting with age and pain,  
Those years would come; and you'd have felt the salt  
fountains of loneliness  
Drain from your eyes when the day came and she died.  
There's not a pleasure in the world not paid for,  
Michal,  
In pain with a penny or two for interest. But youth, they  
say, is a shining time, and no doubt for you  
The pleasures outsun the pains. Then the hair grays, and  
the teeth blacken or drop, and the sky blackens.  
You've swollen ankles and shrunk thighs, and horrible  
hanging breasts that flap like a hound's ears,  
Or death comes first . . . Oh, but I'm wrong, it's life I was  
praising! And the pain to the pleasure is sun to candle.  
Joy never kills, you know, the most violent joy  
Never drove anyone mad. Pain kills, and pain drives mad;  
and extreme pain can feed for days  
On the stretched flesh; the extremes of pleasure rot in two  
minutes.

Oh yes, but, Michal,  
Surely life's . . . good? My father—his thoughts were deep,

Patient and wise—believed it was good because it was growing.

At first it was a morsel of slime on the sea,  
It grew to be worms and fishes, lizards and snakes,  
You see the progress, then things with hair and hot blood,  
It was coming up from the ocean and climbing mountains,  
Subduing the earth, molding its bundle of nerves  
Into the magnificent mind of man, and passing  
Beyond man, to more wonders. That helped my father!  
He loved that. You and me of course it can't help,  
Because we know nothing goes on forever.  
What good is better and better if best draws blank?  
Here's the oak was growing upward a hundred years  
And now it withers. Sometime the world  
Will change, only a little too hot or too cold  
Or too dry, and then life will go like the oak.  
Then what will all my father's magnificent thoughts,  
Michal, and all the dreams of your children be worth?  
Well, we must praise life for some other reason.  
For surely it's . . . good? We know it must be. Here every  
morning

You bring food to this bird to keep it alive:  
Because you love it: in its filth, in misery, in prison. What's  
wretchered than a caged eagle? Guess. I'll not tell.  
And you'd be bitter cruel to keep it alive: sick-feathered,  
abject, broken-armed: only, you know,  
Life is so *good*. It's true the creature seems ungrateful:  
but I am not grateful either; to Dante  
Vitello who pumped the breath into my body."  
She stopped and looked at Michal's white face, and said  
"You haven't heard from Hood yet? He went so suddenly,  
He ought to write you." Michal said "No," and Fera:  
"You know nothing about him?" She cried trembling:

“Why do you ask about Hood? Why do you ask about  
Hood?

Let me alone.” “Ah,” Fera said, “do you think  
That something has happened to him?” “He’ll never come  
back.

It was your fault.” “I’m sure he’ll never come back,”  
She said with a still face. “Now let’s go down.  
But I can’t joke about your eagle, Michal.  
The hopeless cage of pain is a lamp  
Shining rays that go right through the flesh  
And etch the secrets of bone. Mine aches. Oh no, Michal,  
*I* couldn’t do it: but George would kill him for you:  
Or ask your father: that’s better: those are the hands.”

Another morning Fera went up  
Secretly under the redwoods to the Rock’s foot,  
Where the great ribbed and battering granite face  
Came down and found earth. In spring the cliff-swallows  
nest

A third of the way up, and a pair of duck-hawks  
Two thirds of the way. High in air the gray dome  
Seemed swaying from the sweep of the small fibrous clouds.  
Fera crept back and forth at the foot with pale  
Spying eyes: but this loose earth was only a squirrel’s  
mound,

And that was a gopher’s digging: for hours: and she found  
Stones had been rolled together, their brown earth-bellies  
Turned up to the sky, and the gray lichenous backs  
Downward, there was fresh earth below, with grass  
blades

Half buried, and ferns trampled. One rain had fallen.  
She stood and gazed and said to him there: “Did I not  
say beforehand

That after we were dead I should have no rest after all but  
run moaning  
On the gray shore, gnawing for my hunger a wrist of  
shadow?" She found a brown scurf on the slope rocks  
Above, and thought, "This is the blood that burst from  
your mouth when you fell"; caressing with hers the  
doubtful  
Crust, that was really a brown lichen. "Oh, why would  
you not listen to me? You chose to die  
Rather than live. Ah, you'd learned wisdom somewhere,  
you were too young to be wise, when with one  
beautiful  
Act of delight, lovely to the giver as the taker, you might  
have made  
A star for yourself and for me salvation." She rose and  
said to the grave: "It was I that killed you. The old man  
Who lives in hell for it was only my hands."

#### XIV

It was true; and it was Cawdor that paid the suffering.  
The woman found ease in words and outcry; the man,  
The more sensitive by sex and by his nature,  
Had forbidden himself action because one act  
Was grown his cancer; speech because speech betrays;  
Even thought, in one regard, for if Hood's guilt  
Were not monstrous the punishment became monstrous,  
And if he had been solicited into adultery  
His guilt was not monstrous but halved and natural;  
There was evidence enough for that, and there  
Thought was forbidden. Meanwhile his mind remained  
Implacably clear for the rest, cloudless harsh light  
On what he had done, memory not dimmed with time

But magnified and more real, not masked with any  
Mysticism, that comes most often and stands  
Between the criminal and his crime, a redeemer  
Shifting the load onto fate; no failure toward unreason  
Except the fantasy of his wife's innocence.

His loved canyon was grown hateful and terrible;  
He longed to go away, go away, but that  
Was cowardice, the set pride and code of his life  
Prohibited that; he desired to kill himself,  
But that was cowardice; to go and accuse himself,  
But that was a kind of cowardice; all the outlets of action  
Were locked and locked. But the most present desire,  
And the most self-despised, was to ask advice  
No matter of whom: of George, of Dante Vitello:  
He yearned on them with his eyes: but that was cowardice  
And ridiculous too. Day by day the tensions of his mind  
Were screwed tighter in silence. He had some strength,  
Though not the strength his vanity used to imagine,  
And now in the deadlock of his powers endurance  
Continued still. He felt the eyes of his house  
That used to peer at him from behind now openly  
Glitter before his face. He believed they all knew,  
Save little Michal, and were kept quiet by fear,  
They watched his face for weakness, as the blackbirds  
In Carmel Valley watch the green fruit for softness.

After the flood in December the later rains  
Fell scant, shrewd north wind heeling listless falls  
Blew the hills dry; Cawdor discovered his mind  
Building conjectural bridges between the drought  
And the curse of his deed; he conquered the sick thought,  
Another cowardice.

In March when the cows were calving  
Came printed news of foot-and-mouth disease  
Among the cattle in the North, it had come in  
Through San Francisco from Asia. An infected herd  
Had been destroyed. Cawdor read and feared nothing,  
His herd in the isolation of the coast canyon  
Would be the last. Yet he dreamed in the night  
That he was slaughtering his herd. A bench was dug  
To stand on, in the steep wall of a gully;  
He stood there with the sledge-hammer and Jesus Acanna  
All black on a black horse against the twilight  
Drove in the cattle. One swing of the hammer for each  
On the peak between the horns, but the white-faced heifer  
Sidled her head and the blow crushed the horn.  
Bawling and slopped with blood down the sleek shoulders,  
Plunging among the carcasses . . . The dream returned  
Too many times; the plague increasing in the north  
He warned his men to guard the pasture and watch  
For strays; then the dream ceased; but the hurt heifer  
Still troubled his dreams.

His mind had relented toward Fera,  
Innocent sufferer and as wretched as himself.  
He saw now that both George and Michal hated her.  
Her arm had knitted crooked, it pained always  
In her pale eyes. He spoke to her kindly; she answered  
patiently.  
He saw as in a vision that if he should choose  
He might go back to his own room from Hood's  
This very night, and all be as it was before.  
To hell with the glittering eyes, they would keep quiet.  
"No," he said and went out of the house. But she

Followed and overtook him under the cypresses  
In the evening twilight.

Michal and George were left  
In the lamplight in the room, and Michal said  
"I want you . . ." she made more words but they were too  
mumbled  
To understand; she stopped and drew breath and said  
Astonishingly aloud, as if she were calling  
Across a canyon: "I want you to kill my eagle.  
I ought never to have kept it. Nothing but wretchedness.  
George, will you kill it quickly and without pain  
To-morrow morning?" He stared at her and said  
"We've other troubles to think of." "Yes. If you won't  
I'll do it myself." "I will. Don't cry, Michal."  
She went up-stairs crying.

In the twilight under the trees  
Fera touched Cawdor's arm and said timidly: "The best  
Would be not to've been born at all; but if we are bound  
to live why should we hate each other?"  
He turned in surprise, he had forgotten her. "You are not  
bound." "By failures of nature. I am like a sick  
beast . . .  
Like Michal's eagle . . . I can't do for myself. I've tried.  
Think of *me* a little. You did the other  
No evil but eternal good. Forget him now, and if I can't  
end: failure's my peg that I hang on:  
Mayn't we go back and live as we were before? You loved  
me once, when I was a child and you  
Were a man." He stood silent thinking of another matter,  
suddenly he barked with laughter and said,

“What am I now?” “A living God: you could answer prayer if you pleased.” “Don’t be troubled,” he said, “About God. You talk about God The day before you go mad.” “I can’t do that either. Are you afraid to live,” she answered, “Because they whisper? But they know nothing; they’ve not a thread of evidence. I’ve talked to them all, not one But I, not one but I could betray you.” She peered up at his face to see what it said in the twilight. It said nothing; he was thinking of another matter, and walking the open way from the trees, slowly Toward the sea’s fading light. “Besides, they are all afraid of you. Oh listen!” she said. “We two alone Have all the decision. Nobody but I can twitch the reins in your hands. Look at me.” She caught his arm. “Am I changed?” He looked, and suddenly laughed with pleasure. “Why . . . like a blown-out candle. Perfectly changed. The fragrance all gone, all the wind fallen.” He failed to see the lightning pallor, he was so prisoned In the surprise of his mind. “No more in my eyes than a dead stick. No more,” he said in astonishment, “Than Concha Rosas.” He spoke with no intention of cruelty, his mind in the pain of its own bonds Islanded alone, incapable of feeling another’s. She clasped her throat with her hand and said shuddering: “For this. No, not another time. I went on my knees to Hood, I made myself a shameless beggar, I washed his feet with tears. That’s not done twice. To love me: and he would not Ah, God how can I make you know it? I duped you too well. Ah, dupe, Ah, fool,” she stammered, “Ah, murderer.

Machine that one winds up and it goes and does it. I  
wound you, I was the one. Now the air's fire  
To drink and the days and nights the teeth and throat of  
a dog: shall I hide your eyes with my hand always  
From what you have done, to let you die in sweet ignorance?"

He said, "Go on. Strain it out, gasping, a heifer  
With the first calf." "It's the only child I'll bear you. I  
hope you will like the child. You killed the other  
Woman's but mine perhaps will spill *you*  
From the same rock. For proofs: ask Michal, she heard me  
pray to him for love: ask Concha Rosas again,  
The fat beast listened and saw, she heard me, she helped  
me fool you: ask Jesus Acanna,  
Watched me lead Hood from my father's earth to the  
laurel to be my lover: *I* led him, *I* called him, *I* flung  
Flowers and fire at his feet: he never at mine: and he  
refused me, he died for that. Ask your eyes,  
Heartless blue stones in their caves, wanted to be blind  
and they saw,  
They saw me come down in the rain to call him, the rain  
steamed where it struck, I was hot, I walked in a  
shameless  
Burning heat; my father was dying but I ran down.  
And again you saw me, Hood was naked in bed at dawn,  
you caught me in his room. Had he received me  
Gladly or kindly, had he raised his arms to receive me? I  
begged and he put me by, I broke in to beg  
And he was driving me out when you came. He remembered  
his father's honor, he was a fool and faithful,  
He's paid for it, he was faithful to you, you paid the  
wages. Ah, wait, I've more.  
It's precious to me to tell you these things, I've hardly  
desired honey-sweet death a longer while."

"You lie too much," he answered, "I asked you before to tell me. Pour it out."

He stood like a gray tree in the twilight, only a surface trembling, the axe was blunted in the bark,

Fera thought; and she said: "I asked him to cut leaves from the laurel to lay in my father's grave,

There are no flowers in this ditch,

And under the laurel I gave him my love. Are you glad that he had my love? That saves you, that lets you live.

The old husband happy in his wife's pleasures.

Under the laurel it was, behind the concealing oaks, under the laurel it was. Before,

I had only cried out and begged with tears, but there I gave him my body, my arms about him, my breasts

Against him: be patient will you, this is not much, this is not the poison: I gave him my flesh to eat,

As Michal takes up meat to the eagle, but he was wilder than the eagle.

He remembered his father's honor, he would not feed. My arms were his cage, I held the meat to his mouth,

He would not feed." Her face distorted itself and seemed to reflect flame, like the white smoke

Of a hidden fire of green wood shining at night, twisting as it rises. Gipsies crouch by the smoke's root

Watching strange flesh simmer in the pot between the forked sticks. When the wind varies their eyes prickle

And the shine of the smoke hides the gray stars. Her face writhed like the shining smoke and she cried and said:

"I wish the little rivers under the laughing kingfishers in every canyon were fire, and the ocean

Fire, and my heart not afraid to go down.

I broke my heart against his mouth like honeycomb, he  
would not take me, Oh, the bitter honey, the  
black-blooded  
Drops from the wax, no wonder he refused me. There was  
a lion-skin  
I wore to my death, was it you stole it or Concha? He  
gave it to me, his one gift, but your house  
Is a house of thieves. One boy was honest and so you  
killed him. The boy respected his father's possession.  
He despised me, he spat me out. Then when I pressed him  
hard and set fire to his body: the heart and soul  
I never could reach, they were both stones: he took his  
hunter's knife in his hand, he made the pain  
Of the point in his flesh a servant against me. Into his  
thigh he drove it, he laughed and was lame, and  
triumphed,  
And limped into the darkness of death."

She stood silent, and Cawdor remembered  
his son's lameness  
Stumbling under the old man's coffin up the steep hill. He  
groaned aloud, then Fera's face  
Gleaming spotted the darkness before his eyes. "I loved  
him," she said. "Love is a trap that takes  
The trapper and his game in the same teeth. The first to  
die has the luck. They hang bleeding together.  
But you were a mere dupe and a common murderer,  
Not love but envy, dupe and fool, what will you do?"  
He swayed against the dark hill, "You make the lies,"  
He said hoarsely, "must I always believe them?  
Time. Time. All my damnation draws  
From having done in a haste. What do you want?"  
"If I were you

And had your strength I'd kill the woman first,  
Then cut out the eyes that couldn't tell my innocent  
Boy's head from a calf's to butcher,  
And smell my way to the Rock and take the jump."  
"I asked you," he said, "because a known devil's  
Word is a warning." She came and touched him. "The  
first's  
Easiest," she said, "to kill the woman: the rest  
Follows of its own accord." She stroked his face  
and said  
"It is all easy." He took her throat in his hands,  
She did not tremble nor flinch; he tightened his  
fingers  
Slowly, as if he were dreaming the thing, not doing it,  
Then her mouth opened, but the ivory face  
Kept its composure still; his fingers closed  
A little harder and half checked the hot breath.  
Suddenly she clawed at his hands with hers, she cried  
"Have pity! I didn't mean it. Oh, Oh, I was lying.  
Let me live!" He set her by and ran back to the house,  
She heard him sob as he ran.

George was alone  
In the lamp-lit room, Cawdor came in and said  
"It's nothing," and went up-stairs, his eyes so  
sunken  
That no gleam showed. He shut himself in the room  
He used now, where Hood had slept before. George  
followed  
Quietly and saw the crack under the door  
Silent of light; he listened and heard no sound.  
Then he returned down-stairs. Fera had come in;  
She made a smile and passed him and went to her place.

## XV

In the morning Cawdor failed to come down ; Michal  
At length knocked at his door. She listened, trembling,  
And got no answer. She opened the door. He stood  
Against the window and said "Is it you Michal?  
I'm not well. Let me alone." She saw that the bed  
Had not been slept in ; she could not see his face  
Against the shining light, but his voice frightened her,  
So gentle and forlorn. "Let me bring you some breakfast,  
Father?" "No," he said, "no. But there's one thing  
You could do for me." "What thing?" "To let me alone.  
Nothing else. Nothing else." She saw that his face  
Kept turning toward the bed, the eyes and features  
Could hardly be seen against the morning light.  
She thought he meant to lie down.

When Michal had gone  
He locked the door, and leaning to the bed whispered :  
"She didn't see you. How astonished she'd have been,  
She thinks you're hunting in the north." He smiled fondly  
And touched the pillow. "You always had fine hair  
But now it has grown longer." A sad perplexity  
Wrinkled his face; when he drew back his hand  
His eyes were again serene. He went to the window  
And stood with his back against the light. "From here  
I see you the most clearly. Ah, no, lie quiet.  
You've had a fall," he said shaking, "don't speak.  
This puts my eyes in heaven." He stood a long while  
And his face darkened. "She keeps begging to die.  
Plenty of others want that and make less noise.  
It was only a sorrowful joke last night,  
I'd not have done it. I made her beg off at least.

But when she squealed I hardly could let go,  
My fingers cramped like the arms of breeding toads.  
I've lived some months in pain."

He listened, and said:

"I know. Thank God. But if you had died, what then?  
I had too much foolish pride to throw the game  
Because it hurt." He paused and said "I thought  
I needed punishment but death's no punishment.  
I thought of telling the sheriff": he laughed. "I know him.  
And a judge save me? I had to judge myself.  
Run to a judge was only running away  
From judgment; I thought I'd not do that; shame Michal  
And do no good. Running away. I thought the same  
Of killing myself. Oh, I've been thinking.  
If I'd believed in hellfire I'd have done it  
Most nights of the week." He listened, and shook his head.  
"No value in needless pain? Oh, yet if I lay  
As damned with blood as I believed I was  
I'd manage somehow. Tit for tat is good sense.  
The debt was to myself as well as to you,  
And mostly I've paid my debts. Well, I thank God.  
This black's turned gray."

Michal had found her brother  
Mending iron at the forge, the little shed  
Behind the work-shop; she'd heard the hammer and found  
him.

"Have you forgotten your promise?" "Why, no," George  
answered,

"I'll do it for you. I thought you'd change your mind."  
She was as pale as if a dear friend's death  
Were being sealed in the plot. "Then do it quickly.

I think that father," she said, "is going to be sick.  
Our lives perhaps will change, I'll not have time  
For trapping squirrels to notch the dreary days  
Of the cage with pitiful instants of pleasure." He frowned  
And struck the iron, the red darkening, with scales  
Of black, and white flecks.

While George went to the house  
For his revolver, Michal climbed up the hill  
Weeping; but when he came with death in his hand  
She'd not go away, but watched. At the one shot  
The great dark bird leaped at the roof of the cage  
In silence and struck the wood; it fell, then suddenly  
Looked small and soft, muffled in its folded wings.

The nerves of men after they die dream dimly  
And dwindle into their peace; they are not very passionate,  
And what they had was mostly spent while they lived.  
They are sieves for leaking desire; they have many  
pleasures  
And conversations; their dreams too are like that.  
The unsocial birds are a greater race;  
Cold-eyed, and their blood burns. What leaped up to death,  
The extension of one storm-dark wing filling its world,  
Was more than the soft garment that fell. Something had  
flown away. Oh cage-hoarded desire,  
Like the blade of a breaking wave reaped by the wind, or  
flame rising from fire, or cloud-coiled lightning  
Suddenly unfurled in the cave of heaven: I that am  
stationed, and cold at heart, incapable of burning,  
My blood like standing sea-water lapped in a stone pool,  
my desire to the rock, how can I speak of you?  
Mine will go down to the deep rock.

This rose,  
Possessing the air over its emptied prison,  
The eager powers at its shoulders waving shadowless  
Unwound the ever-widened spirals of flight  
As a star light, it spins the night-stabbing threads  
From its own strength and substance: so the aquiline desire  
Burned itself into meteor freedom and spired  
Higher still, and saw the mountain-dividing  
Canyon of its captivity (that was to Cawdor  
Almost his world) like an old crack in a wall,  
Violet-shadowed and gold-lighted; the little stain  
Spilt on the floor of the crack was the strong forest;  
The grain of sand was the Rock. A speck, an atomic  
Center of power clouded in its own smoke  
Ran and cried in the crack; it was Cawdor; the other  
Points of humanity had neither weight nor shining  
To prick the eyes of even an eagle's passion.

                  This burned and soared. The shining ocean below lay on  
                  the shore  
Like the great shield of the moon come down, rolling  
                  bright rim to rim with the earth. Against it the multiform  
And many-canyoned coast-range hills were gathered into  
                  one carven mountain, one modulated  
Eagle's cry made stone, stopping the strength of the sea.  
                  The beaked and winged effluence  
Felt the air foam under its throat and saw  
The mountain sun-cup Tassajara, where fawns  
Dance in the steam of the hot fountains at dawn,  
Smoothed out, and the high strained ridges beyond  
                  Cachagua,  
Where the rivers are born and the last condor is dead,  
Flatten, and a hundred miles toward morning the Sierras

Dawn with their peaks of snow, and dwindle and smooth  
down  
On the globed earth.

It saw from the height and desert space of  
unbreathable air  
Where meteors make green fire and die, the ocean dropping  
westward to the girdle of the pearls of dawn  
And the hinder edge of the night sliding toward Asia; it  
saw far under eastward the April-delighted  
Continent; and time relaxing about it now, abstracted  
from being, it saw the eagles destroyed,  
Mean generations of gulls and crows taking their world:  
turn for turn in the air, as on earth  
The white faces drove out the brown. It saw the white  
decayed and the brown from Asia returning;  
It saw men learn to outfly the hawk's brood and forget it  
again; it saw men cover the earth and again  
Devour each other and hide in caverns, be scarce as  
wolves. It neither wondered nor cared, and it saw  
Growth and decay alternate forever, and the tides  
returning.

It saw, according to the sight of its kind, the archetype  
Body of life a beaked carnivorous desire  
Self-upheld on storm-broad wings: but the eyes  
Were spouts of blood; the eyes were gashed out; dark blood  
Ran from the ruinous eye-pits to the hook of the beak  
And rained on the waste spaces of empty heaven.  
Yet the great Life continued; yet the great Life  
Was beautiful, and she drank her defeat, and devoured  
Her famine for food.

There the eagle's phantom perceived  
Its prison and its wound were not its peculiar wretchedness,  
All that lives was maimed and bleeding, caged or in  
    blindness,  
Lopped at the ends with death and conception, and shrewd  
Cautery of pain on the stumps to stifle the blood, but not  
Refrains for all that; life was more than its functions  
And accidents, more important than its pains and pleasures,  
A torch to burn in with pride, a necessary  
Ecstasy in the run of the cold substance,  
And scape-goat of the greater world. (But as for me,  
I have heard the summer dust crying to be born  
As much as ever flesh cried to be quiet.)  
Pouring itself on fulfilment the eagle's passion  
Left life behind and flew at the sun, its father.  
The great unreal talons took peace for prey  
Exultantly, their death beyond death; stooped upward,  
    and struck  
Peace like a white fawn in a dell of fire.

## XVI

Cawdor in the room in the house, his eyes fixed  
On the empty bed: "Age tells. I've known the time . . .  
But now from having fasted a night of sleep  
After some bad ones, my eyes have a dazzle in them  
So that I sometimes lose your face, then instantly  
The trouble returns. I was cut deep:  
But never half my deserving." He heard a listener  
Lean at the door and the latch move a little;  
His face blanked and was still. After long silence  
A gentle tapping, and spoken through the shut door:  
"I think you are not well: let me in a moment.

Your voice has been going on and on like fever  
And now why has it stopped?" Cawdor stood shaking  
Like a gray horse tethered short to the fence,  
Unable to rear or step back, a serpent rattling  
Its passionate sistrum in the lupin by the hooves.  
He extended hands toward the bed, his eyes widened  
To hold their vision, but as he feared it vanished,  
Then he was not able to restrain his hands  
From feeling the length of the bed, patting and stroking  
Where there was nothing but the smooth coverlet.  
He stood and hardened himself, the knocking renewed.  
"I have been deceived. It began in the dark,"  
He whispered, "and I've dreamed on after dawn.  
Men go crazy this way . . . not I. All's black again,  
But the dream was sweet. Black, black, black. Ah,"  
He said to the door, "keep still!"

The knocking ceased

And steps retreated. Suddenly his black anguish  
Compelled him to kneel by the bed. "What shall I do?  
Kill that woman? I've promised not to kill  
Fly nor stinking beetle. Nor myself: that  
Would be a little too easy, I am a murderer  
But not a coward yet. Nothing, is hardest to do.  
Oh, God show me a way. Nothing?" The prayer  
And the attitude stiffened his nerves with self-contempt.  
He ceased and stood up. "Nor this." Himself was  
responsible,  
Himself must choose, himself must endure. He stood  
And looked at the bed, remembering the sweet dream.

More steps came to the door and he drew it open  
Before one knocked. Fera said "You are sick,

And I was afraid to come back alone. I brought  
Concha Rosas." He looked from one to the other,—  
"Both my vomits," he said gently. "I'll never  
Send you away. This is something." She whispered to him:  
"You are in danger. Everyone here . . . knows.  
Ask Concha. If you shut yourself up they'll tell; they've  
been asked;

Only the fear of your face stops them.

Jesus Acanna was asked in Monterey

When he drove in the steers." Cawdor said gently:

"Stay here. I'll keep you with me both days and nights

For a live spark between the eye-lid and the eye.

What ails you to bring good news?" "I knew he was going  
mad.

*Good* news? Why, they'll not hang you. I'll be your perfect

Witness to keep you alive. Buried alive

While all the strength you're proud of rots and drops off,

And all the stupid and deceived mind

Tears itself into red strips behind gray

Stones and black iron. Where is it, San Quentin? Oh, kill  
yourself Cawdor.

You have no better hope." "I am all you say,

Blind, blind, blind dupe," he answered, "but not a  
coward yet." "My God,

Watch the man cling, Concha. Who'd ever think

That *his* was sweet to live? But it's not love of life,

It's terror of death." He was not listening. He looked

With softened anxious eyes at the bed, his lips

Moved, though he did not speak. She, not in mockery:

"What do you see?" "A face that I know perfectly

Was crushed—what day of the month is it?—three months

And certain days ago, to a red lump

Of sudden destruction: but can you see?—he smiles at me.

I know there is nothing there." Fera laughed, "Concha  
Has scuttled away. *I* see his angry eyes  
And tumbled light brown hair and bare strong  
shoulders . . ."

"Yes: his hair." " . . . when I ran in here at dawn,  
He lifted himself in the bed like a white sea-lion  
Out of the running wave. His breast was bare.  
And it was smooth, it was like smooth grooved stone.  
You caught me here in the room." Cawdor looked down  
And smiled and trembled. "Perhaps if I hadn't come.  
Perhaps if I hadn't come." "You were pitiful enough,"  
She said, "before. We'd both like to think that.  
No, he was straight and true and faithful as light.  
Hard as crystal, there was not a spot to hold by.  
We two are damned." She watched him shaking  
And thought that now he would make some end; but he  
Looked downward sideways and said "It has faded now.  
You needn't wait, I'll never again do anything  
Until I have thought and thought. I'll find a way."  
He said in the door, "I thought the woman was with you."  
"Concha? She scuttled: I told you." "No, you said  
nothing."

She followed. When they were on the stair they heard  
George's revolver-shot that killed the eagle,  
And the quick echo. Cawdor stopped on the stair  
And looked at Fera's face. "Why did you turn  
So strangely," she said, "what do you see? I fear  
You have waited too long already and now your mind  
Is helpless among many voices and ghosts.  
Kill yourself, Cawdor, and be safe from that,  
For soon it will be too late." He said drearily,  
"Since you fooled me my ears and eyes have the trick.

But," with a burrowing motion of the head forward,  
"I'm not deceived. Not deceived. . . . Who has Hood's  
rifle?"

"Ah," she answered, "old fox, that hole won't hide you.  
He fired because you were coming at him to kill him:  
Your guilt's no less." "I lost it," he said, "in the night in  
the oaks.

I've often looked there, he loved it." They went out-doors  
Under the twisted cypress trees and Cawdor said,  
"What were you saying? He fired in the air, not at me.  
If you were full of eyes you'd find no fault in him."  
Fera laughed out, and pointing at the oak on the hill:  
"Hurrah, she's done it. That was the shot. Oh, well done  
Michal.

*See* if I always fail. The bird shut in a box  
Was eating bitter meat for years and now it is blessed.  
I've been begging her

To make it blessed. Its arm was like mine." "Killed it?  
I'm sorry," he said, "for Michal." Suddenly he ran  
To the dim path and climbed. He shouted "George,  
George"; his heavy voice and the echo of his voice  
battered

Upward between the walls of the canyon.

He came to the shelf of earth, and hoarse  
with breathlessness: "More killing?  
You dog, have you got Hood's gun?" Michal looked at his  
face with startled wet eyes, George did not speak  
But held out the revolver in the flat of his hand. "I  
forgot that," Cawdor said. "Oh Michal, you loved  
This brave-eyed thing. You fed it for years." "It was  
unhappy, father." "By God, if you go killing

Unhappiness who'll be left in the houses? Forgive me," he said humbly, "I've much to bear." She, trembling: "Why . . ." she wetted her lips with her tongue . . . "why did you ask about Hood's rifle, he wouldn't leave it?" George, hastily: "His mind's on another matter. You told me to fix the branding-iron shafts . . ." Fera had come Behind Cawdor, and driving her face like an axe between them: "Let him confess. He came to confess. Listen to him for that will deliver his mind, thence he may win  
Your eagle's quietness: we used to feel this cage like a black sun shining darkness on the canyon.  
Now you've put out the sun, you've cured the sky with a gun-shot, nothing but a draggled feather-duster Left in the cage. Let him confess." Cawdor said hoarsely: "I have learned that Hood was innocent. This woman So angered me that I threatened his life in the night. I am dull and easy to lie to. Hood went away Rather than quarrel with the fool his father; he left his rifle under my feet by the fire; I lost it; If I could find it I'd keep it for him." "Ai," Fera cried sharply, "this is no good. Wait, that gray face Will ripen by summer: you can't bear it forever. What did he use, his revolver? Even so little A creature as that is a key to peace." Cawdor said, "Let me see it again." George clicked the cylinder Out of the frame before he handed it to him. Cawdor took and returned it. "If I were weak enough I could find ways, though I am not wise." He saw a knife-edged flake of chipped flint or chalcedony On the earth at his feet; they stood by Fera's father's grave, and the spring rains had failed and not grassed it.

Cawdor picked up the Indian-wrought stone. "There  
were people here before us," he said, "and others  
will come  
After our time. These poor flints were their knives, wher-  
ever you dig you find them, and now I forget  
What we came up for. Why do you fix your eyes on me?  
For I can neither imagine what I must do  
Nor what I should say. You are like shadows." George  
said "Father:  
Send this woman away. This is the bitter fountain, this is  
your sickness." "For the rifle," she answered,  
"Acanna has it. Send me away: do: I've a pretty story for  
strangers, I'll bring back eyes  
And dig for the old dog's hoard of bones." She said to  
Cawdor: "Now you've grown gentle, you can't eat  
meat,  
But the others know we'd venison Thursday, Jesus  
Acanna killed it. He says that he got his rifle  
In Monterey, have you seen the rifle, Michal? You country  
people have quick minds." "Oh, this is nothing,"  
Cawdor groaned, "What does Hood want with a gun? He  
hunts no more.  
However . . . do you see the sun?" George took his arm:  
"Come, let's go down." "Now it's due south," he  
answered,  
"And men come home from the starved fields for food.  
We'll go and ask him." George made a sign to Michal  
So that she stayed behind when the others went down.  
And Cawdor, seeing it: "That was well done. I see you now.  
A moment ago you were like shadows of moths  
When lamplight falls on the earth outside the window.  
If I could have caught you I couldn't have held you. Send  
away sweet Fera?

What should we do without her?" She said: "That flint  
Came from an old man's grave you used to despise  
For his great weakness; he was the only mind in this ditch;  
But now you don't. What's it for, to nick an artery?"  
"It is hard," he answered, "and pleasant in the hand.  
Last night I threw my knife out of the window  
For fear it might use itself of its own accord.  
I'd a good dream."

He saw Acanna among the cypresses  
And called him with the old strength of his voice. "I hear  
that you've got Hood's rifle, you found it in the little  
oaks  
Near by the Rock. Oh, keep it," he said, "keep it. That's  
nothing. Kill all the deer for Hood has quit hunting,  
Buck, fawn and doe. They say they have foot-and-mouth  
disease  
And carry it over the mountain. But if you see a white doe,  
That's the worst kind. Cut out her tongue when she drops,  
It's poison. . . . You know that I killed him.  
You all know it. George knows it. You've been whispering  
for long,  
Watching my face. You've been staunch and not told  
For askings: but that was wrong, it makes you accessory.  
Now you must ride and tell, don't stay for dinner.  
Get meat in the house and eat on the road, for now  
I've confessed: if you don't tell you'll be in the same  
Sickness with Cawdor. Go. Go." He pushed by him,  
And Acanna stood all twisted, as Cawdor's hands  
Had left him, unable to move, looking for guidance. At  
length  
George twitched his dead-white face and answered:  
"Go on.

Do what he says. He has chosen." While they stood,  
Cawdor  
Faced the hill so that his back was toward them and drove  
The point of the flint through fold and flesh of each eye,  
Drawing sidewise on the stroke, so that his sight  
Was burst, and blood and water ran down to his feet.  
He did not groan, but Fera saw the red stream  
Fall by some yellow flowers. She cried "Have you done  
Wisely at last? Not with that chip?" He groaned then,  
But answered nothing. Then George ran to him and saw  
The bitter thing he had done, and moved with sudden  
Ungovernable pity thrust the revolver  
Into his hand. Cawdor said: "What's this? Oh,  
This thing. Keep it for cage-birds.  
We have other plans. The decent girl my pleasant com-  
panion  
Has promised to lead me by the hand up to the Rock  
And prove our wings." But Fera staggered and said,  
Her arms hanging straight down, head drooped, and knees  
Bent like weak age: "I am broken. It is finished."  
She covered her eyes against him. "My courage is past.  
I have always failed." He said, "I'd not have flown down.  
I meant to sit up there and think my old thoughts  
Until they come to-morrow and take me. It was mere  
indulgence.  
These punishments are a pitiful self-indulgence.  
I'd not the strength to do nothing.

Be kind to Michal:

But spring's weeping-time. Oh, George it was her face  
I fell into this darkness to hide myself from.  
But when I am taken from the sight of my mountain  
It is better to have no eyes. Has Acanna gone?

Your drougthy hay-harvest will be a thin sight."  
He extended his hands. "Lead me, whoever is here,  
Into the house. My head is full of sharp lightnings  
And the ground streams and falls under my feet."



## *The Dead Men's Child*

The track across the desert runs vague toward the north  
star and then more firmly  
Along the clipped butt of the mountain; it curves into a  
bay of the cliff, where natural cisterns  
Keep water in the streaked rock; the people call them *las*  
*tinajas altas*—the high water-jars—  
Which every second or third summer a thunderstorm  
Fills with clear life; if the lowest is empty one must climb  
to the next. There is a worked-out silver-mine  
Gouged in the cliff beyond them; a single ironwood tree  
lives on the leakage below them, and here  
Men used to camp, coming up from Mexico.

A train of smugglers was lost here long ago.  
It is said  
The tanks were dry then except the highest, and men who  
wanted the smugglers' goods bailed that one empty,  
And ambushed up the mountain, defended it with their  
rifles. For half the furnace morning the thirsty  
Fought up to reach it; when they won it at length it was  
found dry. The horses could not go on,  
They died, and the men died, of thirst and their wounds.

Across the trail, opposite the ironwood tree,  
Stands a low mound of rock and sand, where later travellers

Deposited the parched and mummied companions and  
spread them over with a sheet of sand ; there had been  
already

Two or three graves dug in that barrow. The desert wind  
respected none of these burials, the sun  
And wind played with the bones and flesh until they were  
dust of the barrow.

A good while later, men found  
A vein of silver in the cliff and opened the mine. A little  
encampment grew up, Mexican laborers  
Came with their wives and black-eyed children. One  
saint's day evening some of the younger people of the  
camp

Made fire on the mound of half forgotten dead men,  
opposite the ironwood tree. They ate and drank there  
In a circle about the flame, under the desert stars. Rosaria  
Rivas was one of the girls

In that company; after some months she was found pregn-  
ant. She told her parents that when the fire  
Died down and the others departed she had remained on  
the place. In the night chill she had drawn her skirt  
(Being all alone) above her knees to warm them at the  
red embers, then suddenly a swirl of wind

From the east blew dust and ashes into her unsheltered  
body. So by mere ignorant accident Rosaria  
Conceived a child, neither for pleasure nor kindness, only  
by the innocent malice of the dark wind

Driving the dust of the dead. Her story was easily  
Believed; the more because she had little reason for lying.

Morality was not so enviously strict  
Among them that love had to go masked. Her child was  
born the due tenth moon after that saint's day,

And she was much pitied, having the pain without the  
pleasure. But people soon perceived that her son  
Was only a little different from other children ; they all are  
mongrels between the present and the past,  
Their natures drawing as much from men and beasts long  
dead as from either parent. Yet in time this child  
Of the dust of dead men proved his quality. He throve in  
fortune ; he was never duped nor reckless ; his life  
Ran smooth because he had nothing *future* about him.  
Men do not stumble on bones mostly but on seeds,  
And this young man was not of the sad race of Prometheus,  
to waste himself in favor of the future.



## *Fawn's Foster-Mother*

The old woman sits on a bench before the door and quarrels  
With her meager pale demoralized daughter.  
Once when I passed I found her alone, laughing in the sun  
And saying that when she was first married  
She lived in the old farmhouse up Garapatas Canyon.  
(It is empty now, the roof has fallen  
But the log walls hang on the stone foundation; the  
redwoods  
Have all been cut down, the oaks are standing;  
The place is now more solitary than ever before.)  
“When I was nursing my second baby  
My husband found a day-old fawn hid in a fern-brake  
And brought it; I put its mouth to the breast  
Rather than let it starve, I had milk enough for three  
babies.  
Hey, how it sucked, the little nuzzler,  
Digging its little hoofs like quills into my stomach.  
I had more joy from that than from the others.”  
Her face is deformed with age, furrowed like a bad road  
With market-wagons, mean cares and decay.  
She is thrown up to the surface of things, a cell of dry skin  
Soon to be shed from the earth's old eye-brows,  
I see that once in her spring she lived in the streaming  
arteries,  
The stir of the world, the music of the mountain.



## *A Redeemer*

The road had steepened and the sun sharpened on the high  
ridges; the stream probably was dry,

Certainly not to be come to down the pit of the canyon.

We stopped for water at the one farm

In all that mountain. The trough was cracked with

drought, the moss on the boards dead, but an old dog

Rose like a wooden toy at the house-door silently. I said

“There will be water somewhere about,”

And when I knocked a man showed us a spring of water.

Though his hair was nearly white I judged him

Forty years old at most. His eyes and voice were muted.

It is likely he kept his hands hidden,

I failed to see them until we had dipped the spring. He

stood then on the lip of the great slope

And looked westward over an incredible country to the

far hills that dammed the sea-fog: it billowed

Above them, cascaded over them, it never crossed them,

gray standing flood. He stood gazing, his hands

Were clasped behind him; I caught a glimpse of serous red

under the fingers, and looking sharply

When they drew apart saw that both hands were wounded.

I said “Your hands are hurt.” He twitched them

from sight,

But after a moment having earnestly eyed me displayed

them. The wounds were in the hearts of the palms,

Pierced to the backs like stigmata of crucifixion. The  
horrible raw flesh protruded, glistening  
And granular, not scabbed, nor a sign of infection. "These  
are old wounds." He answered, "Yes. They don't  
heal." He stood  
Moving his lips in silence, his back against that fabulous  
basin of mountains, fold beyond fold,  
Patches of forest and scarps of rock, high domes of dead  
gray pasture and gray beds of dry rivers,  
Clear and particular in the burning air, too bright to  
appear real, to the last range  
The fog from the ocean like a stretched compacted thun-  
derstorm overhung; and he said gravely:  
"I pick them open. I made them long ago with a clean  
steel. It is only a little to pay—"  
He stretched and flexed the fingers, I saw his sunburnt  
lips whiten in a line, compressed together,  
"If only it proves enough for a time—to save so many." I  
searched his face for madness but that  
Is often invisible, a subtle spirit. "There never," he said,  
"was any people earned so much ruin.  
I love them, I am trying to suffer for them. It would be  
bad if I should die, I am careful  
Against excess." "You think of the wounds," I said, "of  
Jesus?" He laughed angrily and frowned, stroking  
The fingers of one hand with the other. "Religion is the  
people's opium. Your little Jew-God?  
*My* pain," he said with pride, "is voluntary.  
They have done what never was done before. Not as a  
people takes a land to love it and be fed,  
A little, according to need and love, and again a little;  
sparing the country tribes, mixing

Their blood with theirs, their minds with all the rocks and  
rivers, their flesh with the soil: no, without hunger  
Wasting the world and your own labor, without love pos-  
sessing, not even your hands to the dirt but plows  
Like blades of knives; heartless machines; houses of steel:  
using and despising the patient earth . . .  
Oh, as a rich man eats a forest for profit and a field for  
vanity, so you came west and raped  
The continent and brushed its people to death. Without  
need, the weak skirmishing hunters, and without  
mercy.  
Well, God's a scare-crow; no vengeance out of old rags.  
But there are acts breeding their own reversals  
In their own bellies from the first day. "I am here" he  
said—and broke off suddenly and said "They take  
horses  
And give them sicknesses through hollow needles, their  
blood saves babies: I am here on the mountain making  
Antitoxin for all the happy towns and farms, the lovely  
blameless children, the terrible  
Arrogant cities. I used to think them terrible: their gray  
prosperity, their pride: from up here  
Specks of mildew.

But when I am dead and all you with whole  
hands think of nothing but happiness,  
Will you go mad and kill each other? Or horror come over  
the ocean on wings and cover your sun?  
I wish," he said trembling, "I had never been born."

His wife came from the door while he was talking. Mine  
asked her quietly, "Do you live all alone here,

Are you not afraid?" "Certainly not," she answered, "he  
is always gentle and loving. I have no complaint  
Except his groans in the night keep me awake often. But  
when I think of other women's  
Troubles: my own daughter's: I'm older than my husband,  
I have been married before: deep is my peace."



## *An Artist*

That sculptor we knew, the passionate-eyed son of a  
quarryman,  
Who astonished Rome and Paris in his meteor youth, and  
then was gone, at his high tide of triumphs,  
Without reason or good-bye; I have seen him again lately,  
after twenty years, but not in Europe.

In desert hills I rode a horse slack-kneed with thirst.  
Down a steep slope a dancing swarm  
Of yellow butterflies over a shining rock made me hope  
water. We slid down to the place,  
The spring was bitter but the horse drank. I imagined  
wearings of an old path from that wet rock  
Ran down the canyon; I followed, soon they were lost, I  
came to a stone valley in which it seemed  
No man nor his mount had ever ventured, you wondered  
whether even a vulture'd ever spread sail there.  
There were stones of strange form under a cleft in the far  
hill; I tethered the horse to a rock  
And scrambled over. A heap like a stone torrent, a  
moraine,  
But monstrously formed limbs of broken carving appeared  
in the rock-fall, enormous breasts, defaced heads  
Of giants, the eyes calm through the brute veils of fracture.  
It was natural then to climb higher and go in

Up the cleft gate. The canyon was a sheer-walled crack  
winding at the entrance, but around its bend  
The walls grew dreadful with stone giants, presences  
growing out of the rigid precipice, that strove  
In dream between stone and life, intense to cast their  
chaos . . . or to enter and return . . . stone-fleshed,  
nerve-stretched  
Great bodies ever more beautiful and more heavy with  
pain, they seemed leading to some unbearable  
Consummation of the ecstasy . . . but there, troll among  
Titans, the bearded master of the place accosted me  
In a cold anger, a mallet in his hand, filthy and ragged.  
There was no kindness in that man's mind,  
But after he had driven me down to the entrance he spoke  
a little.

The merciless sun had found the slot now  
To hide in, and lit for the wick of that stone lamp-bowl a  
sky almost, I thought, abominably beautiful;  
While our lost artist we used to admire: for now I knew  
him: spoke of his passion.

He said, "Marble?  
White marble is fit to model a snow-mountain: let man be  
modest. Nor bronze: I am bound to have my tool  
In my material, no irrelevances. I found this pit of dark-  
gray freestone, fine-grained, and tough enough  
To make sketches that under any weathering will last  
my lifetime. . . .

The town is eight miles off, I can fetch food and no one  
follows me home. I have water and a cave

Here; and no possible lack of material. I need, therefore,  
nothing. As to companions, I make them.  
And models? They are seldom wanted; I know a Basque  
shepherd I sometimes use; and a woman of the town.  
What more? Sympathy? Praise? I have never desired them  
and also I have never deserved them. I will not show  
you  
More than the spalls you saw by accident.

What I see is the enormous beauty of  
things, but what I attempt  
Is nothing to that. I am helpless toward that.  
It is only to form in stone the mold of some ideal  
humanity that might be worthy to *be*  
Under that lightning. Animalcules that God (if he were  
given to laughter) might omit to laugh at.

Those children of my hands are tortured, because they  
feel," he said, "the storm of the outer magnificence.  
They are giants in agony. They have seen from my eyes  
The man-destroying beauty of the dawns over their notch  
yonder, and all the obliterating stars.  
But in their eyes they have peace. I have lived a little and  
I think  
Peace marrying pain alone can breed that excellence in  
the luckless race, might make it decent  
To exist at all on the star-lit stone breast.

I hope," he said, "that when I grow old and  
the chisel drops,  
I may crawl out on a ledge of the rock and die like a wolf."

These fragments are all I can remember,

These in the flare of the desert evening. Having been  
driven so brutally forth I never returned ;  
Yet I respect him enough to keep his name and the place  
secret. I hope that some other traveller  
May stumble on that ravine of Titans after their maker  
has died. While he lives, let him alone.



## *The Summit Redwood*

Only stand high a long enough time your lightning will  
    come: that is what blunts the peaks of redwoods:  
But this old tower of life on the hilltop has taken it more  
    than twice a century, this knows in every  
Cell the salty and the burning taste, the shudder and the  
    voice

        The fire from heaven; it has felt the earth's  
    too  
Roaring up hill in autumn, thorned oak-leaves tossing  
    their bright ruin to the bitter laurel-leaves, and all  
Its under-forest has died and died, and lives to be burnt;  
    the redwood has lived. Though the fire entered,  
It cored the trunk while the sapwood increased. The trunk  
    is a tower, the bole of the trunk is a black cavern,  
The mast of the trunk with its green boughs the mountain  
    stars are strained through  
Is like the helmet-spike on the highest head of an army;  
    black on lit blue or hidden in cloud  
It is like the hill's finger in heaven. And when the cloud  
    hides it, though in barren summer, the boughs  
Make their own rain.

        Old Escobar had a cunning trick when he  
    stole beef. He and his grandsons

Would drive the cow up here to a starlight death and hoist  
the carcass into the tree's hollow,  
Then let them search his cabin, he could smile for pleasure,  
to think of his meat hanging secure  
Exalted over the earth and the ocean, a theft like a star,  
secret against the supreme sky.



## *Ascent to the Sierras*

Beyond the great valley an odd instinctive rising  
Begins to possess the ground, the flatness gathers to little  
humps and barrows, low aimless ridges,  
A sudden violence of rock crowns them. The crowded  
orchards end, they have come to a stone knife;  
The farms are finished; the sudden foot of the sierra. Hill  
over hill, snow-ridge beyond mountain gather  
The blue air of their height about them.

Here at the foot of the pass  
The fierce clans of the mountain you'd think for thousands  
of years,  
Men with harsh mouths and eyes like the eagles' hunger,  
Have gathered among these rocks at the dead hour  
Of the morning star and the stars waning  
To raid the plain and at moonrise returning driven  
Their scared booty to the highlands, the tossing horns  
And glazed eyes in the light of torches. The men have  
looked back  
Standing above these rock-heads to bark laughter  
At the burning granaries and the farms and the town  
That sow the dark flat land with terrible rubies . . .  
lighting the dead . . .

It is not true: from this land

The curse was lifted ; the highlands have kept peace with  
the valleys ; no blood in the sod ; there is no old sword  
Keeping grim rust, no primal sorrow. The people are all  
one people, their homes never knew harrying ;  
The tribes before them were acorn-eaters, harmless as  
deer. Oh, fortunate earth ; you must find someone  
To make you bitter music ; how else will you take bonds  
of the future, against the wolf in men's hearts ?



## *Contrast*

The world has many seas, Mediterranean, Atlantic, but  
here is the shore of the one ocean.

And here the heavy future hangs like a cloud; the  
enormous scene; the enormous games preparing  
Weigh on the water and strain the rock; the stage is here,  
the play is conceived; the players are not found.

I saw on the Sierras, up the Kaweah valley above the  
Moro rock, the mountain redwoods  
Like red towers on the slopes of snow; about their bases  
grew a bushery of Christmas green,  
Firs and pines to be monuments for pilgrimage  
In Europe; I remembered the Swiss forests, the dark robes  
of Pilatus, no trunk like these there;  
But these are underwood; they are only a shrubbery  
about the boles of the trees.

Our people are clever and masterful;  
They have powers in the mass, they accomplish marvels.  
It is possible Time will make them before it annuls  
them, but at present  
There is not one memorable person, there is not one mind  
to stand with the trees, one life with the mountains.



## *Bixby's Landing*

They burned lime on the hill and dropped it down here in  
an iron car  
On a long cable; here the ships warped in  
And took their loads from the engine, the water is deep to  
the cliff. The car  
Hangs half way over in the gape of the gorge,  
Stationed like a north star above the peaks of the  
redwoods, iron perch  
For the little red hawks when they cease from hovering  
When they've struck prey; the spider's fling of a cable  
rust-glued to the pulleys.  
The laborers are gone, but what a good multitude  
Is here in return: the rich-lichened rock, the rose-tipped  
stonecrop, the constant  
Ocean's voices, the cloud-lighted space.  
The kilns are cold on the hill but here in the rust of the  
broken boiler  
Quick lizards lighten, and a rattlesnake flows  
Down the cracked masonry, over the crumbled fire-brick.  
In the rotting timbers  
And roofless platforms all the free companies  
Of windy grasses have root and make seed; wild buck-  
wheat blooms in the fat  
Weather-slacked lime from the bursted barrels.

Two duckhawks darting in the sky of their cliff-hung nest  
are the voice of the headland.

Wine-hearted solitude, our mother the wilderness,  
Men's failures are often as beautiful as men's triumphs,  
but your returnings

Are even more precious than your first presence.



## *Ocean*

It dreams in the deepest sleep, it remembers the storm  
    last month or it feels the far storm  
Off Unalaska and the lash of the sea-rain.  
It is never mournful but wise, and takes the magical  
    misrule of the steep world  
With strong tolerance, its depth is not moved  
From where the green sun fails to where the thin red clay  
    lies on the basalt  
And there has never been light nor life.  
The black crystal, the untroubled fountain, the roots of  
    endurance.

                    Therefore I belted  
The house and the tower and courtyard with stone,  
And have planted the naked foreland with future forest  
    toward noon and morning: for it told me,  
The time I was gazing in the black crystal,  
To be faithful in storm, patient of fools, tolerant of  
    memories and the muttering prophets,  
It is needful to have night in one's body.



## *Soliloquy*

August and laurelled have been content to speak for an  
age, and the ages that follow  
Respect them for that pious fidelity;  
But you have disfeatured time for timelessness.  
They had heroes for companions, beautiful youths to  
dream of, rose-marble-fingered  
Women shed light down the great lines;  
But you have invoked the slime in the skull,  
The lymph in the vessels. They have shown men Gods like  
racial dreams, the woman's desire,  
The man's fear, the hawk-faced prophet's; but nothing  
Human seems happy at the feet of yours.  
Therefore though not forgotten, not loved, in gray old  
years in the evening leaning  
Over the gray stones of the tower-top,  
You shall be called heartless and blind;  
And watch new time answer old thought, not a face  
strange nor a pain astonishing;  
But you living be laired in the rock  
That sheds pleasure and pain like hail-stones.



## *The Bird with the Dark Plumes*

The bird with the dark plumes in my blood,  
That never for one moment, however I patched my truces,  
Consented to make peace with the people,  
It is pitiful now to watch her pleasure in a breath of tempest  
Breaking the sad promise of spring.  
Are these that morose hawk's wings, vaulting, a mere  
    mad swallow's,  
The snow-shed peak, the violent precipice?  
Poor outlaw that would not value their praise do you  
    prize their blame?  
"Their liking," she said, "was a long creance,  
But let them be kind enough to hate me, that opens the  
    sky."  
It is almost as foolish my poor falcon  
To want hatred as to want love; and harder to win.



## *To a Young Artist*

It is good for strength not to be merciful  
To its own weakness, good for the deep urn to run over,  
    good to explore  
The peaks and the deeps, who can endure it,  
Good to be hurt, who can be healed afterward: but you  
    that have whetted consciousness  
Too bitter an edge, too keenly daring,  
So that the color of a leaf can make you tremble, and your  
    own thoughts like harriers  
Tear the live mind: were your bones mountains,  
Your blood rivers to endure it? and all that labor of  
    discipline labors to death.  
Delight is exquisite, pain is more present;  
You have sold the armor, you have bought shining with  
    burning, one should be stronger than strength  
To fight baresark in the stabbing field  
In the rage of the stars: I tell you unconsciousness is the  
    treasure, the tower, the fortress;  
Referred to that one may live anything;  
The temple and the tower: poor dancer on the flints and  
    shards in the temple porches, turn home.



## *Tor House*

If you should look for this place after a handful of  
lifetimes:  
Perhaps of my planted forest a few  
May stand yet, dark-leaved Australians or the coast  
cypress, haggard  
With storm-drift; but fire and the axe are devils.  
Look for foundations of sea-worn granite, my fingers had  
the art  
To make stone love stone, you will find some remnant.  
But if you should look in your idleness after ten  
thousand years:  
It is the granite knoll on the granite  
And lava tongue in the midst of the bay, by the mouth of  
the Carmel  
River-valley, these four will remain  
In the change of names. You will know it by the wild sea-  
fragrance of wind  
Though the ocean may have climbed or retired a little;  
You will know it by the valley inland that our sun and  
our moon were born from  
Before the poles changed; and Orion in December  
Evenings was strung in the throat of the valley like a  
lamp-lighted bridge.  
Come in the morning you will see white gulls  
Weaving a dance over blue water, the wane of the moon

Their dance-companion, a ghost walking  
By daylight, but wider and whiter than any bird in the  
world.

My ghost you needn't look for; it is probably  
Here, but a dark one, deep in the granite, not dancing on  
wind

With the mad wings and the day moon.



## *George Sterling's Death*

Sorrows have come before and have stood mute  
With blind implacable masks; when the eyes have  
    endured them  
They draw sidelong and stand  
At the shoulder; they never depart.

The sweetest voice has desired silence, the eyes  
Have desired darkness, the passion has desired peace.  
He that gave, and not asked  
But for a friend's sake, has taken

One gift for himself : he gives a greater, he goes  
Remembered utterly generous, constraining sorrow  
Like winter sundown; splendid  
Memory to ennoble our nights.

The gray mothers of rain sail and glide over,  
The rain has fallen, the deep-wombed earth is renewed;  
Under the greening of the hills  
Gulls flock in the black furrows.

And now it is hard to believe he will not return  
To be our guest in the house, nor walk beside me  
Again by the Carmel river  
Or on the Sovranes reef.



## *Hurt Hawks*

### I

The broken pillar of the wing jags from the clotted shoulder,  
The wing trails like a banner in defeat,  
No more to use the sky forever but live with famine  
And pain a few days: cat nor coyote  
Will shorten the week of waiting for death, there is game  
without talons.

He stands under the oak-bush and waits  
The lame feet of salvation; at night he remembers freedom  
And flies in a dream, the dawns ruin it.  
He is strong and pain is worse to the strong, incapacity is  
worse.

The curs of the day come and torment him  
At distance, no one but death the redeemer will humble  
that head,  
The intrepid readiness, the terrible eyes.  
The wild God of the world is sometimes merciful to those  
That ask mercy, not often to the arrogant.  
You do not know him, you communal people, or you have  
forgotten him;  
Intemperate and savage, the hawk remembers him;  
Beautiful and wild, the hawks, and men that are dying,  
remember him.

## II

I'd sooner, except the penalties, kill a man than a hawk;  
but the great redtail  
Had nothing left but unable misery  
From the bone too shattered for mending, the wing that  
trailed under his talons when he moved.  
We had fed him six weeks, I gave him freedom,  
He wandered over the foreland hill and returned in the  
evening, asking for death,  
Not like a beggar, still eyed with the old  
Implacable arrogance. I gave him the lead gift in the  
twilight. What fell was relaxed,  
Owl-downy, soft feminine feathers; but what  
Soared: the fierce rush: the night-herons by the flooded  
river cried fear at its rising  
Before it was quite unsheathed from reality.



## *Meditation on Saviors*

### I

When I considered it too closely, when I wore it like an  
element and smelt it like water,  
Life is become less lovely, the net nearer than the skin, a  
little troublesome, a little terrible.

I pledged myself awhile ago not to seek refuge, neither in  
death nor in a walled garden,  
In lies nor gated loyalties, nor in the gates of contempt,  
that easily lock the world out of doors.

Here on the rock it is great and beautiful, here on the  
foam-wet granite sea-fang it is easy to praise  
Life and water and the shining stones: but whose cattle  
are the herds of the people that one should love them?

If they were yours, then you might take a cattle-breeder's  
delight in the herds of the future. Not yours.  
Where the power ends let love, before it sours to jealousy.  
Leave the joys of government to Caesar.

Who is born when the world wanes, when the brave soul  
of the world falls on decay in the flesh increasing  
Comes one with a great level mind, sufficient vision,  
sufficient blindness, and clemency for love.

This is the breath of rottenness I smelt; from the world  
waiting, stalled between storms, decaying a little,  
Bitterly afraid to be hurt, but knowing it cannot draw the  
savior Caesar but out of the blood-bath.

The apes of Christ lift up their hands to praise love: but  
wisdom without love is the present savior,  
Power without hatred, mind like a many-bladed machine  
subduing the world with deep indifference.

The apes of Christ itch for a sickness they have never  
known; words and the little envies will hardly  
Measure against that blinding fire behind the tragic eyes  
they have never dared to confront.

## II

Point Lobos lies over the hollowed water like a humped  
whale swimming to shoal; Point Lobos  
Was wounded with that fire; the hills at Point Sur  
endured it; the palace at Thebes; the hill Calvary.

Out of incestuous love power and then ruin. A man forcing  
the imaginations of men,  
Possessing with love and power the people: a man defiling  
his own household with impious desire.

King Oedipus reeling blinded from the palace doorway,  
red tears pouring from the torn pits  
Under the forehead; and the young Jew writhing on the  
domed hill in the earthquake, against the eclipse

Frightfully uplifted for having turned inward to love the  
people:—that root was so sweet Oh, dreadful  
agonist?—

I saw the same pierced feet, that walked in the same crime  
to its expiation; I heard the same cry.

A bad mountain to build your world on. Am I another  
keeper of the people, that on my own shore,  
On the gray rock, by the grooved mass of the ocean, the  
sicknesses I left behind me concern me?

Here where the surf has come incredible ways out of the  
splendid west, over the deeps  
Light nor life sounds forever; here where enormous  
sundowns flower and burn through color to quietness;

Then the ecstasy of the stars is present? As for the people,  
I have found my rock, let them find theirs.  
Let them lie down at Caesar's feet and be saved; and he in  
his time reap their daggers of gratitude.

### III

Yet I am the one made pledges against the refuge con-  
tempt, that easily locks the world out of doors.  
This people as much as the sea-granite is part of the God  
from whom I desire not to be fugitive.

I see them: they are always crying. The shored Pacific  
makes perpetual music, and the stone mountains  
Their music of silence, the stars blow long pipings of  
light: the people are always crying in their hearts.

One need not pity; certainly one must not love. But who  
has seen peace, if he should tell them where peace  
Lives in the world . . . they would be powerless to  
understand; and he is not willing to be reinvolved.

#### IV

How should one caught in the stone of his own person  
dare tell the people anything but relative to that?  
But if a man could hold in his mind all the conditions at  
once, of man and woman, of civilized

And barbarous, of sick and well, of happy and under  
torture, of living and dead, of human and not  
Human, and dimly all the human future:—what should per-  
suade him to speak? And what could his words change?

The mountain ahead of the world is not forming but fixed.  
But the man's words would be fixed also,  
Part of that mountain, under equal compulsion; under the  
same present compulsion in the iron consistency.

And nobody sees good or evil but out of a brain a  
hundred centuries quieted, some desert  
Prophet's, a man humped like a camel, gone mad between  
the mud-walled village and the mountain sepulchres.

#### V

Broad wagons before sunrise bring food into the city  
from the open farms, and the people are fed.  
They import and they consume reality. Before sunrise a  
hawk in the desert made them their thoughts.

## VI

Here is an anxious people, rank with suppressed blood-thirstiness. Among the mild and unwarlike Gautama needed but live greatly and be heard, Confucius needed but live greatly and be heard.

*This* people has not outgrown blood-sacrifice, one must writhe on the high cross to catch at their memories; The price is known. I have quieted love; for love of the people I would not do it. For power I would do it.

—But that stands against reason: what is power to a dead man, dead under torture?—What is power to a man Living, after the flesh is content? Reason is never a root, neither of act nor desire.

For power living I would never do it; they are not delightful to touch, one wants to be separate. For power After the nerves are put away underground, to lighten the abstract unborn children toward peace . . .

A man might have paid anguish indeed. Except he had found the standing sea-rock that even this last Temptation breaks on; quieter than death but lovelier; peace that quiets the desire even of praising it.

## VII

Yet look: are they not pitiable? No: if they lived forever they would be pitiable:  
But a huge gift reserved quite overwhelms them at the end; they are able then to be still and not cry.

And having touched a little of the beauty and seen a little  
of the beauty of things, magically grow  
Across the funeral fire or the hidden stench of burial  
themselves into the beauty they admired,

Themselves into the God, themselves into the sacred  
steep unconsciousness they used to mimic  
Asleep between lamp's death and dawn, while the last  
drunkard stumbled homeward down the dark street.

They are not to be pitied but very fortunate; they need no  
savior, salvation comes and takes them by force,  
It gathers them into the great kingdoms of dust and  
stone, the blown storms, the stream's-end ocean.

With this advantage over their granite grave-marks, of  
having realized the petulant human consciousness  
Before, and then the greatness, the peace: drunk from  
both pitchers: these to be pitied? These not fortunate?

But while he lives let each man make his health in his  
mind, to love the coast opposite humanity  
And so be freed of love, laying it like bread on the waters;  
it is worst turned inward, it is best shot farthest.

Love, the mad wine of good and evil, the saint's and  
murderer's, the mote in the eye that makes its object  
Shine the sun black; the trap in which it is better to catch  
the inhuman God than the hunter's own image.







